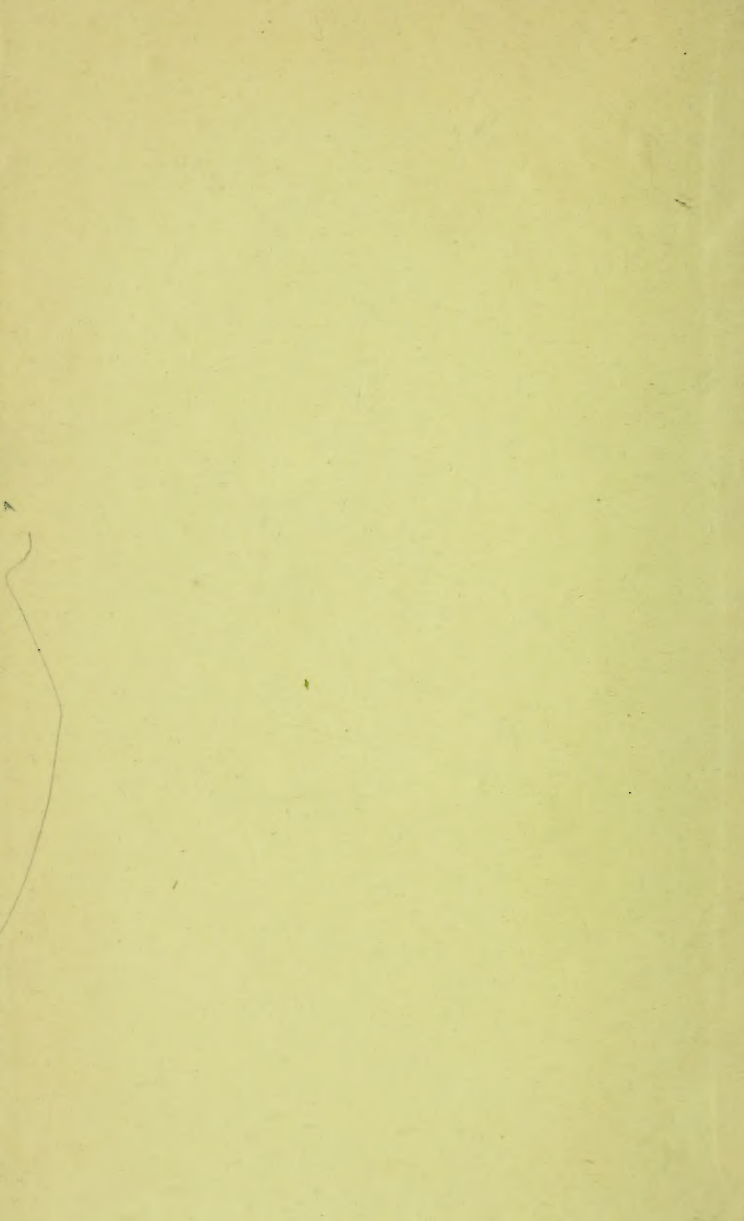





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THE
REFUGE

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

THE GUIDE TO DOMESTIC HAPPINESS.



When boisterous winds and stormy billows roar,
Disturb the deep, and rend the rocky shore,
The foaming seas in swelling mountains rise,
Forsake their caverns and attempt the skies ;
Ere long succeeds the placid calm serene,
And stops the progress of the frightful scene
The rolling waves in gentle currents glide,
And softly murmur down the ebbing tide.

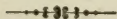


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PREFACE.



THE love of happiness is a passion predominant in the human breast, and for the enjoyment of which, individuals of every description are anxiously concerned.

To say in what this happiness consists, or how it may certainly be had, is an invidious task; because men of different tastes, dispositions, and capacities, not only view the subject in different lights, but adopt opposite means to obtain it. There can, however, it is presumed, be little risk of censure to him who shall assert, that whatever has a natural tendency to irradiate the mind, to regulate the affections, and to meliorate the conduct, must be friendly to happiness.

Such is the wisdom, and such the goodness of the great Parent of the universe, that he has provided sources of pleasure exactly suited to the compound nature of man. But it is the indelible opprobrium of our species, that those enjoyments which are merely sensual, and of which, in subserviency to higher ends, we might lawfully partake, engross too frequently the whole of our attention; while those of a refined and exquisite nature, and in which felicity might be more reasonably expected, are entirely neglected or forgotten.

This is the effect of a vitiated taste, which has precipitated thousands into inextricable difficulties, and into which it had nearly hurried my fair correspondent, of whom some account will be found in the following Introduction, and to whom the Letters subjoined are addressed.

To him who is conscious of danger and anxious for help, deliverance must be acceptable. This was once the situation of the amiable Lavinia. Her importunate entreaties could not be heard with indifference; she was directed to the REFUGE where protection was known to be certain; and where she not only found security, but the rest and happiness she wanted.

To this impression of the Refuge, some additions have been made, which, though not extensive, may perhaps be thought deserving of regard. The whole work has indeed been attentively examined; and, if compared with the former edition, will be found, in many places, to have undergone alterations intended to give precision to thought, and energy to truth. The author is, however, far from imagining that the labour of revision will preclude the use of criticism. Perfection is not attainable by man. But if what has been done, shall have any tendency to promote purity of sentiment, or rectitude of conduct; to honour the gospel of God, or to facilitate the happiness of man, the time devoted to this purpose will not have been spent in vain.

THE REFUGE.



INTRODUCTION.

OF all the passions that agitate the human mind, there is perhaps no one more grateful in itself, or more useful to man, than sympathy.

Virtue in distress is sure to attract notice and excite commiseration. The sufferings of others, it is true, cannot be witnessed without painful emotion; but these emotions we neither wish to suppress, nor attempt to diminish: for such is the wonderful construction of our nature, and such the delightful tendency of this passion, that instead of endeavouring to avoid, we take pleasure in approaching the object of misery. The ear is open to the cry of calamity; the tale of woe is heard with melting tenderness; we instantly participate

the grief; we mingle sigh with sigh, tear with tear, and wish, anxiously wish, to alleviate, if we cannot remove, the cause of inquietude.

To sympathy we are indebted for a thousand endearments in social life; it is the bond of society; we feel ourselves interested in the general good; we experience more pleasure in communicating than in receiving the means of happiness; and in contemplating its benign influence, perceive both the propriety and the excellency of that divine aphorism: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

But though such be the general tendency of this benevolent affection, there are objects of wretchedness, on which the world has no compassion to bestow. Men whose consciences are burdened with guilt, and harassed with painful apprehensions respecting futurity, seldom meet with sympathetic tenderness. But how are we to account for the dereliction of human nature in this case? Is not the anguish arising from a consciousness of moral turpitude equally pungent with that which the loss of terrestrial comforts may incidentally occasion? Surely the cause of sorrow in the former as far exceeds the latter, as the perpetual favour of heaven transcends the momentary calamities of life! "The spirit of a man will sus-

tain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

It may be said, in answer to this inquiry, that pain of conscience has relation to guilt, and is the effect of sin operating against a known rule prescribed for the regulation of moral conduct. In order, therefore, to sympathize with the contrite sufferer, we must have the same ideas respecting the equity of God's government, the detestable nature of sin, and the justice of that punishment with which it is connected. But natural men see things in a very different light. Their consciences are not under the authority of the law of God; no beauty is beheld in the divine precepts; nor do they, it is to be feared, really believe that the commission of moral evil will be attended with those dreadful consequences which the scriptures constantly affirm. It is, therefore, impossible, in the very nature of the case, that men with such ideas should feel for a soul tortured with guilt; the distress endured will be considered rather as chimerical than real, or at least as the effect of superstitious credulity, and as deserving raillery more than commiseration, or severe rebuke rather than serious expostulation.

That men frequently act on this principle,

in giving advice to persons under religious impressions, needs no proof. What more common than to hear the disconsolate mourner exhorted to shun the haunts of solitude, to rouse from the torpor of dejection, to frequent the resorts of diversion, to look for tranquillity and pleasure in the circles of gaiety, where every eye sparkles with joy; where the ear is charmed with sprightly sallies of wit; where novelty gives perpetual delight; and the mind, released from the gloom of reflection, is restored to freedom and to happiness?

But these prescriptions are not adapted to the malady. They have been frequently administered, but without success. The throbs of guilt are not to be lulled by the sound of the tabret and the pipe, the harp or the viol; and the deluded patient who shall try the experiment, will find that he has not expelled, but increased his complaint; and the symptoms may perhaps be so rapid and so alarming, as to generate despair of relief instead of exciting hope of deliverance. For what is the natural tendency of such admonition? Is it not saying, in effect, Be familiar with vice, or at least with vanity; blunt the edge of remorse by the accession of fresh guilt; hope for quiet in the midst of tumult; and drown

the clamours of conscience in obstreperous merriment?

Lavinia was the daughter of one of the first families in London. Her parents, dying when she was young, left her to the care of an aunt, whose fortune she was to inherit, and who felt herself deeply interested in having her successor instructed in all the useful and polite accomplishments that endear society and embellish life. At an early period, Lavinia gave ample proof that the expectations formed of her capacity and her attainments were not likely to be disappointed; for she made such rapid progress in all the branches of female education, as rendered her the pattern of all who aspired to excellence.

The guardian of our young pupil, who was a woman of the first rank and fashion, could not long defer the happiness she expected to participate, when the wondering world should first witness the charms that were never beheld by her but with maternal fondness. Lavinia, who was elegant in her form, and graceful in her manners, was, therefore, introduced early into all the polite circles, and received with the most flattering tokens of admiration. Every eye was struck with her beauty, and every tongue lavish in her praise.

Nor was the marked attention paid her in all companies ungratefully received: for who can be deaf to the voice of praise? or unwilling to believe that it may be heard without vanity, and received as a just tribute to excellence, which, if hidden to ourselves and the vulgar, others, possessed of keen discernment, refined taste, and impartial judgment, have not only discovered, but kindly endeavoured to appreciate?

Few were the resorts of pleasure at which Lavinia was not the rival of her sex. She was surrounded by men of the first rank, each ambitious to attract her notice, and to bow obsequious to her will. The sprightly sallies of her wit were heard with rapture; her fascinating demeanour captivated every heart; and she received, on every hand, those tokens of respect, a moderate share of which would have transported the hearts of thousands.

“A solitary philosopher would imagine ladies born with an exemption from care and sorrow, lulled in perpetual quiet, and feasted with unmingled pleasure; for what can interrupt the content of those, upon whom one age has laboured after another to confer honours, and accumulate immunities; those to whom

rudeness is infamy, and insult is cowardice; whose eye commands the brave, and whose smiles soften the severe; whom the sailor travels to adorn, the soldier bleeds to defend, and the poet wears out life to celebrate; who claim tribute from every art and science, and for whom all who approach them endeavour to multiply delights, without requiring from them any return but willingness to be pleased?

“Surely among those favourites of nature, thus unacquainted with toil and danger, felicity must have fixed her residence; they must know only the changes of more vivid or more gentle joys; their life must always move either to the slow or sprightly melody of the lyre of gladness; they can never assemble but to pleasure, nor retire but to peace.

“Such would be the thoughts of every man who should hover at a distance round the world, and know it only by conjecture and speculation. But experience will soon discover how easily those are disgusted who have been made nice by plenty, and tender by indulgence. He will soon see to how many dangers power is exposed which has no other guard than youth and beauty, and how easily that tranquillity is molested which can only be soothed with the songs of flattery.

It is impossible to supply wants as fast as an idle imagination may be able to form them, or to remove all inconveniences by which elegance, refined into impatience, may be offended. None are so hard to please as those whom satiety of pleasure makes weary of themselves; nor any so readily provoked as those who have been always courted with an emulation of civility."

In the midst of affluence and splendour, of pleasure and of praise, Lavinia still found that happiness was absent. The hour of solitude could not be endured without painful anxiety. Something seemed to be wanting which the world, with all its complaisance, had not yet conferred. New expedients were therefore daily invented to tranquillize the mind, and no means left untried to regain her wonted vivacity. But, alas! the felicity of which Lavinia was in pursuit, still eluded her eager grasp. Every day witnessed new scenes of vexation and disappointment. The wakeful hours of night were spent in tracing the causes of miscarriage; in contriving means by which to preclude a recurrence of the same, or similar impediments; and in planning schemes to ensure felicity on the morrow. Inauspicious was the morning in which the

breast of Lavinia was not transported with the recollection of some new engagement to give delight, of something novel to be seen; with the hope of sparkling in the dance, of shining at the opera or the play-house, of making new conquests, and of receiving fresh tokens of inviolable attachment and reverence.

The return of night, however, but renewed disgust. Every amusement was insipid; the charms of novelty were forgotten; emptiness and vanity were stamped on every enjoyment; for whether at the toilet, the ball, the theatre, or the masquerade, conscience would be heard—"Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," was reiterated in every place, and in accents so distinct, that the meaning could not be mistaken. Fruitless were all attempts to shun the admonitory intelligence, or to blunt the pain it frequently occasioned. Reflection produced remorse; the pleasures of the world, satiety and aversion; the retrospect of life, the keenest anguish, and the prospects of futurity, the horrors of despair.

The thoughtless and the gay may, perhaps, think that the views of Lavinia were enthusiastic or chimerical. But there is no ground for the conclusion. For what is the life of a

vast majority of the great, but a scene of voluptuousness and dissipation—of vanity and extravagance? The affairs of another world, and the moral state of the human heart, are considerations that seldom obstruct their pursuits or interrupt their quiet. I ask, and appeal to the experience and the consciences of those whom providence has elevated to opulence and splendour, whether from the moment of introduction into public life, the time allotted by heaven for acts of beneficence and virtue, is not generally spent in conformity to the fashions of the day; in attendance at routs, and balls, and card-tables; in frequenting the opera and the play-house, or in ceremonious visits paid and received frequently, without pleasure and without friendship.

But are these pursuits worthy of an immortal mind? Is this a life on which a rational being can seriously reflect without the terrors of dismay? Yet this is the life of thousands—a life in which are to be found no traces of that purity and perfection once connatural to man; no evidence of compunction for the violation of divine precepts, nor yet of thankfulness for the means by which guilt is expiated, and the trembling delinquent rescued from perdition. Nay, there are not only those who, like

Gallio, care for none of these things, but some that openly discard them; who, though their sins be as scarlet, "cavil at the means by which they might be made white as snow; and though their iniquities have been multiplied without number, revile the hand which alone can blot them from the register of heaven." These are they that awake but to eat and to drink; to gratify the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. God is not in all their thoughts; his ways are always grievous; and through the pride of their countenance they will not seek after him.

Surely it is unworthy of a reasonable being to spend any of the little time allotted us, without some tendency, either direct or oblique, to the end of our existence. And though every moment cannot be laid out on the formal and regular improvement of our knowledge, or in the stated practice of a moral or religious duty, yet none should be so spent as to exclude wisdom or virtue, or pass without possibility of qualifying us more or less for the better employment of those which are to come.

"It is scarcely possible to pass an hour in honest conversation, without being able, when we rise from it, to please ourselves with having

given or received some advantage; but a man may shuffle cards, or rattle dice, from noon to midnight, without tracing any new idea in his mind, or being able to recollect the day by any other token than his gain or his loss, and a confused remembrance of agitated passions, and clamorous altercations."

The beneficent Author of our existence has, for the best of purposes, graciously interwoven in our nature an insatiable thirst after happiness. In pursuit of this happiness all descriptions of men are anxiously engaged; and were we to act consistently with our high origin, we should see both the wisdom and the goodness of God, not only in the implantation of this ever active principle, but in the frustration of every hope that centres in terrestrial enjoyments.

"For not in vain, but for the noblest end,
Heaven bids a constant sigh for bliss ascend;
'Tis love divine that moves th' inviting prize
Before, and still before us, to the skies;
Led by our foible forward till we know,
The good which satisfies is not below."

But ever since the introduction of moral evil into the world, men have changed the object of happiness. They have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters, and have

loved and served the creature instead of the Creator. The cry of all is, indeed, Who will show us any good? but it is a good which, if not suited merely to the animal nature, is always confined to the present life, and which, when enjoyed, is ever found inadequate both to our desires and our expectations. The truth is, we form a wrong estimate of this good, and expect from fruition that which it was never designed to communicate; so that by raising our hopes too high, we lose the pleasure which might be lawfully indulged, and then complain of disappointment and vexation, without considering that the fault lay, not in the object itself, but in the unwarrantable expectations it was intended to gratify. But though perpetually foiled on every hand,

Yet still for this we pant, on this we trust,
And dream of happiness allied to dust.

Nothing can quench our thirst for earthly good nor damp the ardour of pursuit. No suspicion is entertained that the means and the end are at variance. Miscarriage is not ascribed to the real, but to other causes. Happiness, though distant, is still thought attainable; we therefore change the scene, contemplate other objects, equally vain, with fresh rapture; resume the chase with redoubled

vigour, pant with ardour for the moment of possession, and if divine goodness do not interpose, go on from stage to stage, till death puts an end to the career of hope, the sinner awakes from his delirium, looks round with horror and expires!—For

“ Let changing life be varied as it will,
This weakness still attends, affects us still.
Displeased for ever with our present lot,
This we possess, as we possessed it not ;
Put earth's whole globe in wild ambition's power,
O'er one poor world she'd weep, and wish for more.
To birth add fortune, add to fortune fame,
Give the desiring soul its utmost claim,
The wish recurs—some object unpossessed
Corrodes, distastes, and leavens all the rest ;
And still to death from being's earliest ray,
Th' unknown to-morrow cheats us of to-day.

“ If any one of my readers has looked with so little attention on the world about him, as to imagine this representation exaggerated beyond probability, let him reflect a little upon his own life; let him consider what were his hopes and prospects ten years ago, and what additions he then expected to be made by ten years to his happiness. Those years are now elapsed: have they made good the promise that was extorted from them? Have they advanced his fortune, enlarged his know-

ledge, or reformed his conduct, to the degree that was once expected? I am afraid, every man that recollects his hopes must confess his disappointment; and own, that day has glided unprofitably after day, and that he is still at the same distance from the point of happiness.

“Such is the general dream in which we all slumber out our time; every man thinks the day coming, in which he shall be gratified with all his wishes, in which he shall leave all those competitors behind, who are now rejoicing like himself in the expectation of victory. The day is always coming to the servile in which they shall be powerful, to the obscure in which they shall be eminent, and to the deformed in which they shall be beautiful.”

In the vigour of youth and in the bloom of beauty, surrounded by all that can flatter hope, or stimulate to action, Lavinia entered the avenues of sublunary pleasure in quest of happiness; but the lovely enchantress was not to be found in the regions of terrestrial delight. All the sources of felicity were explored in vain; emptiness was stamped on every enjoyment. Our young votaress soon discovered that her expectations were fallacious; that

many of her pursuits were not only trifling but criminal. A conviction of guilt filled her breast with tumult; terrifying apprehensions agitated her soul; she beheld with astonishment the precipice on which she stood, the imminent danger with which she was surrounded; that there was but a step between her and everlasting ruin; and trembling on this precipice, she first uttered that inexpressibly important query: "What shall I do to be saved?" To answer this inquiry the following letters were first written.

The question, let it be remembered, is always proper, because it is of infinite importance. Surely it cannot be imagined that the present world is the only residence of man; and if he be to exist in a state yet future, it is highly rational to inquire, whether that existence will be miserable or happy. Men in general are, indeed, too much engaged in sublunary pursuits to attend to the concerns of another life. But this will not always be the case. The period is approaching in which conscience, if not quite petrified, will be roused from her torpor; in which she will sound the alarm, and the soul, awakened from sleep, feel the vanity of the world and of all its enjoyments. For what is the glitter

of wealth, the pomp of greatness, the voice of praise, or the frisk of jollity, to him that is acquainted with the depravity of his own heart; who is conscious of allowed and reiterated deviations from the path of duty—of having passed the whole of life heedless of the counsels of wisdom and the dictates of conscience? It is indeed possible that the mind may be diverted by the allurements of pleasure from minute attention to the turpitude of its own actions, but the delusion will not last for ever; a man cannot always trifle; the hour of reflection will obtrude; and if he determine not to anticipate, he must shortly be compelled to realize the period when deception and artifice will be impracticable; when all terrestrial scenes shall be withdrawn; when the soul, no longer soothed by flattery nor seduced by hope, must converse with death; and this too in a moment, perhaps, when the avenues of mercy are closed for ever, and in which the affrighted soul will have to exclaim, in the terrors of despair, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!”

“How shocking must thy summons be, O Death!
To him that is at ease in his possessions,
Who, counting on long years of pleasure here,

Is quite unfurnished for that world to come !
In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
Raves round the wall of her clay tenement,
Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
But shrieks in vain ! How wishfully she looks
On all she's leaving, now no longer hers !
A little longer, yet a little longer,
Oh, might she stay to wash away her stains,
And fit her for her passage ! mournful sight !
Her very eyes weep blood ; and ev'ry groan
She heaves is big with horror ; but the foe,
Like a stanch murderer, steady to his purpose,
Pursues her close through every lane of life,
Nor misses once the track, but presses on ;
Till forc'd at last to the tremendous verge,
At once she sinks to everlasting ruin."

The only conviction that rushes upon the soul, and takes away from our appetites and passions the power of resistance, "is to be found," says an incomparable writer, "where I have received it, at the bed of a dying friend. To enter this school of wisdom is not the peculiar privilege of geometricians. The most sublime and important precepts require no uncommon opportunities, nor laborious preparations ; they are enforced without the aid of eloquence ; and understood without skill in analytic science. Every tongue can utter them, and every understanding can conceive them. He that wishes, in earnest, to obtain just sen-

timents concerning his condition, and would be intimately acquainted with the world, may find instruction on every side. He that desires to enter behind the scene, which every art has been employed to decorate, and every passion labours to illuminate, and wishes to see life stripped of those ornaments which made it glitter on the stage, and exposed in its natural meanness, impotence, and nakedness, may find all the delusion laid open in the chamber of disease. He will there find vanity divested of her robes ; power deprived of her sceptre ; and hypocrisy without her mask.

“The friend whom I have lost was a man eminent for genius, and, like others of the same class, sufficiently pleased with acceptance and applause. Being caressed by those who have preferments and riches in their disposal, he considered himself as in the direct road to advancement, and had caught the flame of ambition by approaches to its object. But in the midst of his hopes, his projects, and his gaities, he was seized by a lingering disease, which, from its first stage, he knew to be incurable. Here was an end of all his visions of greatness and happiness. From the first hour that his health declined, all his former pleasures grew tasteless. His friends

expected to please him by those accounts of the growth of his reputation, which were formerly certain of being well received; but they soon found how little he was now affected by compliments, and how vainly they attempted, by flattery, to exhilarate the languor of weakness, and relieve the solicitude of approaching death. Whoever would know how much piety and virtue surpass all external goods, might here have seen them weighed against each other; where all that gives motion to the active, and elevation to the eminent; all that sparkles in the eye of hope, and pants in the bosom of suspicion, at once became dust in the balance, without weight and without regard. Riches, authority, and praise, lose all their influence when they are considered as riches which to-morrow shall be bestowed upon another; authority which shall this night expire for ever, and praise which, however merited, or however sincere, shall, after a few moments, be heard no more.

“In those hours of seriousness and wisdom, every thing that terminated on this side of the grave was received with coldness and indifference; and regarded rather in consequence of the habit of valuing it, than from any opinion that it deserved value. It had little

more prevalence over his mind than a bubble that was new broken, a dream from which he was awake. His whole powers were engrossed by the consideration of another state, and all conversation was tedious, that had not some tendency to disengage him from human affairs, and open his prospects into futurity.

“It is now past; we have closed his eyes, and heard him breathe the groan of expiration. At the sight of this last conflict, I felt a sensation never known to me before, a confusion of passions, an awful stillness of sorrow, a gloomy terror without a name. The thoughts that entered my soul were too strong to be diverted, and too piercing to be endured; but such violence cannot be lasting; the storm subsided in a short time. I wept, retired, and grew calm.

“I have, from that time, frequently revolved in my mind, the effects which the observation of death produces in those who are not wholly without the power and use of reflection; for, by far the greater part, it is wholly unregarded; their friends and their enemies sink into the grave without raising any uncommon emotion, or reminding them that they are themselves on the edge of the precipice, and

that they must soon plunge into the gulf of eternity.

“Surely, nothing can so much disturb the passions, or perplex the intellects of man, as the disruption of his union with visible nature; a separation from all that has hitherto delighted or engaged him; a change not only of the place, but the manner of his being; an entrance into a state, not simply which he knows not, but which, perhaps, he has not faculties to know; an immediate and perceptible communication with the Supreme Being, and, what is above all distressful and alarming, the final sentence, and unalterable allotment.

“Yet we, to whom the shortness of life has given frequent occasions of contemplating mortality, can, without emotion, see generations of men pass away, and are at leisure to establish modes of sorrow, and adjust the ceremonial of death. We can look upon funeral pomp as a common spectacle in which we have no concern, and turn away from it to trifles and amusements, without dejection of look, or inquietude of heart.

“It is, indeed, apparent from the constitution of the world, that there must be a time for other thoughts; and a perpetual meditation upon the last hour, however it may become

the solitude of a monastery, is inconsistent with many duties of common life. But surely the remembrance of death ought to predominate in our minds as an habitual and settled principle, always operating though not always perceived; and our attention should seldom wander so far from our own condition, as not to be recalled and fixed by the sight of an event, which must soon, we know not how soon, happen likewise to ourselves, and of which, though we cannot appoint the time, we may secure the consequence.

“Every instance of death may justly awaken our fears, and quicken our vigilance; but its frequency so much weakens its effect, that we are seldom alarmed, unless some close connection is broken, some scheme frustrated, or some hope defeated. Many, therefore, seem to pass on from youth to decrepitude without any reflection on the end of life, because they are wholly involved within themselves, and look on others only as inhabitants of the common earth, without any expectation of receiving good, or intention of bestowing it.

“Custom so far regulates the sentiments of common minds, that I believe men may be generally observed to grow less tender as

they advance in age. He who, when life was new, melted at the loss of every companion, can look in time, without concern, upon the grave into which his lost friend was thrown, and into which himself is ready to fall; not that he is more willing to die than formerly, but that he is more familiar with the death of others, and therefore is not alarmed, so far as to consider how much nearer he approaches to his end. But this is to submit tamely to the tyranny of accident, and to suffer our reason to lie useless. Every funeral may justly be considered as a summons to prepare us for that state, into which it shows us that we must some time enter; and the summons is more loud and piercing, as the event of which it warns us is at less distance. To neglect, at any time, preparation for death, is to sleep on our post at a siege; but to omit it in old age, is to sleep at an attack.

“It has always appeared to me one of the most striking passages in the visions of Quevedo, which stigmatizes those as fools who complain that they failed of happiness by sudden death: ‘How,’ says he, ‘can death be sudden to a being who always knew that he must die, and that the time of his death was uncertain?’

“Since business and gaiety are always drawing our attention away from a future state, some admonition is frequently necessary to recall it to our minds, and what can more properly renew the impression than the examples of mortality which every day supplies? The great incentive to virtue is the reflection that we must die; it will therefore be useful to accustom ourselves, whenever we see a funeral, to consider how soon we may be added to the number of those whose probation is past, and whose happiness or misery shall endure for ever.”

That it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, are truths generally admitted; why then, it may be asked, are we so unwilling to contemplate the hour of departure? Why so reluctant to review a life of which an account must be given, and which, if it have not been wholly devoted to vicious pleasures, has perhaps been wasted in the pursuit of trifles, light and empty as the bubble that floats upon the stream?

It may be said, in answer to this inquiry, that men are in general so much attached to the present scene, that prospects of a celestial nature seldom, if ever, pass in review before them. The whole, or at least the principal

part of their happiness, is derived from objects of sense; consequently, these objects are sought with solicitude; the heart pants for possession; the hope of fruition stimulates to action; and, while this inordinate attachment continues, the mind of course will be diverted from attention to the one thing needful, and the time of serious reflection never occur, till the "night come, in which no man can work."

Should, however, a pause be indulged in the career of life, and a recollection of the past embitter the sweets of the present, men console themselves with the hope of making ample reparation by future repentance and amendment; not considering that they are under the government of a law which requires universal and perpetual obedience—which cannot, in the very nature of the case, dispense with the violation of its own precepts, and from the penalty of which, the sinner of himself cannot possibly escape.

The fact is, we are in ourselves utterly lost; under sentence of condemnation by the law of God; and, without the interposition of mercy, must inevitably perish. To speak in scripture language, "The whole world is become guilty before God; there is none that doeth

good, no, not one ; therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight."

These facts, which are either not credited, or not properly considered by the world, I have endeavoured to prove in some of the subsequent letters. They are, in my view, truths of the last importance, with the knowledge and belief of which our present and our future happiness is intimately connected ; nor do I think their validity can be controverted without manifest opposition to the whole current of revelation. The scriptures proceed on the supposition of the fall and depravity of man, and the principal part of their contents has either a direct or a remote reference to these awful facts.

If, it may be asked, we are in circumstances so dreadfully calamitous ; if human nature be so degenerate and so impotent, who then can be saved ? To answer this infinitely momentous question, divine revelation became absolutely necessary ; for had all the sons of Adam been left to perish, as were the angels who kept not their first estate, no intelligence from heaven would have been requisite to prove their apostasy from God. They would soon have found, by painful experience, that human

nature was greatly debased; that they were, in many instances, under the control of inordinate appetites, and frequently agitated by passions which, in numberless instances, could have no tendency to promote general happiness. As creatures of God, and as subjects of his moral government, they must have considered themselves as amenable to some law; and allowing this law to be founded in justice, which, as originating with God, it must; impartiality and common sense would have concurred in asserting that they could not, in the very nature of things, be released from obligation to its precepts, nor, in the case of failure, be exempted from suffering its penalty.

By the scriptures of truth, and by these only, we know that there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared. Without this astonishingly merciful intelligence, we should have been involved in perpetual uncertainty and darkness. For all the light that ever chased the gloom of doubt, or cheered the bosom of despondency; for all that gives confidence to faith, energy to hope, ardency to love, or fervour to devotion; for whatever can tranquillize the mind in life, or administer consolation at the last hour, we are indebted to the Bible.

That this inestimable book exhibits a salvation worthy the benignity of God, and exactly suited to the wretchedness of man, I have attempted to prove in the following pages. To this salvation, therefore, I have directed my amiable friend, from whom, notwithstanding all her doubts, and all her fears, I had satisfactory evidence that her sorrow was not like the sorrow of the world which worketh death.

It may, perhaps, be asked, If the salvation revealed in the Bible be so admirably well adapted to relieve our miseries, to encourage hope and inspire confidence in the divine benignity, whence the doubts and the fears with which Lavinia appears to be constantly harassed? This, I allow, is a question natural to him who has never felt the bitterness of sin; who has never experienced the corruption of his own heart; nor ever seen, by the light of divine truth, the purity and the perfection of the blessed God. Let the querist have but a discovery of these, and he will see cause enough for dejection; he will cease to wonder that the trembling sinner should reason like the rebel who has ungratefully risen up in arms against his lawful sovereign; who, when contemplating the heinous nature of his crime, is led to conclude that, if punishment be re-

mitted for the present, his rebellion cannot be forgotten, nor he himself again restored to the favour and affection of his prince.

But notwithstanding what the scriptures have said to excite confidence in the divine mercy through Jesus Christ, it will not appear strange that we are so slow of heart to believe, if it be remembered that unbelief is a radical evil in human nature; that by which it was first contaminated, by which it is still influenced, and, in fact, the fruitful source of many atrocities that disgrace the character of man.

When that positive law was given, by conformity to which the first pair were to manifest their submission to the divine will, they were expressly told that, in case of disobedience, they should surely die. But no sooner was the command made known to Satan, that enemy of all righteousness, than he had the audacity to assert, that the prohibitory injunction might be violated with impunity—that they should not surely die—declaring, at the same time, that this was only an artful pretext by which to preclude them from the godlike knowledge which the Almighty knew the fruit of that tree was adapted to impart.

Now on this principle all men proceed in attempting to extenuate the turpitude of their own actions. For though God has peremptorily declared, that he will by no means clear the guilty—that the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God; yet they say, not merely of comparatively small, but of enormous sins, “The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.” Though they continue to indulge their evil propensities in almost every species of iniquity, yet they flatter themselves with the hope of escaping divine justice, or at least that, in consequence of sorrow and repentance at the last hour, the Almighty will mercifully pardon and accept them. Why, therefore, should it be thought unaccountably strange that the real christian should, when left to himself, feel the painful effects of unbelief; be harassed with doubts and fears, and sometimes manifest distrust of the divine goodness? Human nature is the same in both, and so totally depraved, that, without foreign aid, it has neither power nor inclination to counteract the pernicious influence of this diabolical principle. It is not, therefore, the mere promulgation of a fact in reference to salvation by Jesus Christ, that will calm the

perturbed mind, or excite confidence in divine mercy. The carnal mind is alienated from God, and this alienation, especially if attended with deep conviction of apostasy and guilt, generates suspicion, and suspicion distrust; the impediments to reconciliation and to peace must therefore be removed before there can be either confidence or affection. But, as the springs to resist evil in the moral system are in man so completely weakened, the sinner must inevitably fall a prey to his own disease, unless He that spake the world into being mercifully interpose to save the soul from perdition.

If then it be true, that in God we live, and move, and have our being; and that without his divine agency we perform no physical action, surely no argument can be wanted to prove that we must stand solely indebted to him for that faith which counteracts the sinful propensities of our nature, which purifies the heart, and overcomes the world; which, in opposition to sense, is conversant with invisible realities, and which not only joyfully receives, but gratefully confides in the divine testimony.

If, therefore, we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but

our sufficiency is of God—if faith be his gift, and no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him—if, without divine energy, we can neither overcome our natural propensity to evil, love the divine character, nor cordially trust in revealed mercy—if, after having tasted that the Lord is gracious, we cannot stand steadfast in the faith, unless He that began the good work perform it until the day of Christ; what need have we to implore the Father of mercies to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure—that he would guide us by his counsel, and afterwards receive us to glory!

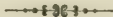
THE REFUGE.

LETTER I



Come then—a still, small whisper in your ear,
He has no hope who never had a fear ;
And he that never doubted of his state,
He may perhaps—perhaps he may too late.

COWPER.



ANXIETY like yours, Lavinia, interests all the feelings of humanity, and imperceptibly raises the soft emotions of compassion. The severity of your trial strikes me with peculiar force; it resembles, in many respects, what I have formerly experienced; and if the recital of similar distress could excite encouragement, I might relate how your affectionate correspondent and others have been exercised in the same circumstances. “ For among the various methods of consolation to which the miseries inseparable from our present state have given

occasion, one of the first comforts which one neighbour administers to another, is a relation of the like infelicity, combined with circumstances of greater bitterness."

But, alas! what can the repetition of distress avail her whose troubles are thought to be too personal, and too great to be lessened by comparison! What! must I then be silent? No; humanity forbids the thought; the distress that I cannot remove, let me endeavour to alleviate; or rather, let me attempt to direct my amiable querist to that God who is the sinner's friend, a very present help in trouble, and who never said to the seed of Jacob—Seek ye me in vain.

Those depressions of guilt which create disquietude, are the natural consequences of sin. The soul, alarmed by the stings of conscience, now perceives how detestable it is in the sight of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity but with abhorrence. A sense of deserved wrath stimulates the risings of despair, and leaves the soul without the least apparent prospect of forgiveness. Permit me, however, to remind you of those days and months in which the commission of sin was never followed by compunction; in which conscience,

now replete with charges of guilt, suffered you to enjoy the pleasures of tranquillity without hinderance, though subject to the same condemnation which is now the sole ground of uneasiness. The remembrance of this tranquillity may indeed add pungency to grief already great; you will, nevertheless, lose nothing by the comparison, but find, on the contrary, that it will lead to the discovery of something adapted to relieve the mind from perplexity and sorrow.

The Almighty, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, generally brings the soul into a state of deep disquietude on account of sin, previous to the manifestation of pardoning mercy. "He killeth and maketh alive; he woundeth that he may heal—he bindeth up the broken in heart. Though he cause grief, he will not cast off for ever; he will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies—weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

There are, undoubtedly, many exceptions to this rule. Some persons are drawn with loving-kindness, by a discovery of divine benevolence to man in the astonishing work of redemption; others experience the same goodness in a way that cannot be described, be-

cause the work of the Holy Spirit has been so gradual as to leave no traces of his first operations on the mind. In each case, however, the Lord acts as a sovereign, distributing his own favours when, and to whom he pleaseth; and as we cannot account for the various dispensations of his grace to sinners, we must rest satisfied while we gratefully rejoice in this certainty—that all are led to see the want of something to procure their acceptance with God, distinct from what is either natural or acquired, before a Saviour can be desirable; and if, to this end, it be your lot to feel much of the agony of guilt, it is nevertheless your duty to be thankful; as the mercy hereafter to be enjoyed will not be lessened by the pain that precedes it.

Your imagining that no permanent good can arise from the incident which first led you to contemplate your conduct and your character, merely because trivial in itself, and no way connected with the glory of God or the happiness of man, is a conclusion derogatory to infinite wisdom, and implicitly limits the Holy One of Israel. The Almighty is never at a loss for means to accomplish his own designs. He can overrule, for this purpose, those that are apparently the most trifling, or, in reality,

the most atrocious. "His thoughts are not our thoughts; nor our ways his ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts."

Little did Zaccheus think that his ardent curiosity to see Jesus was in order to exalt the riches of grace in pardoning one who was, though little in stature, the greatest of sinners; much less that, on the same day, he was to become as conspicuous for restitution and benevolence, as he had formerly been for extortion and oppression. Saul of Tarsus never imagined that his diabolical errand to Damascus would be the occasion of his boldly preaching the faith he purposely went to destroy; nor the thief, when perpetrating the detestable crime for which he suffered on a gibbet, that he was to expire in such circumstances and in such company; or that he was then committing an act for which he was afterwards to be exhibited as a spectacle to angels and to men; that both might have incontestable proof, that He whom the self-righteous Pharisees despised and rejected, was in the last agonies of death—what he always professed to be in his life—the Saviour of sinners!

That state of darkness and of distress which

you think peculiar to yourself, is common to every penitent when a sense of interest in divine forgiveness is withheld. Few persons are led to dispute either the freeness or the all-sufficiency of the grace manifested in the gospel for the pardon of sin; painful concern, in reference to this subject, generally arises from a fear of their having no right to partake of the distinguishing blessing. When this is the case, guilt holds the soul in bondage; unbelief obscures the first glimmerings of hope; and it is precipitately concluded, that there is no ground on which to expect forgiveness. But, with regard to yourself, why this despondency? Doubt neither the sufficiency nor the freeness of grace. That God who hath awakened and wounded the sleeping conscience, hath also directed to a Physician acquainted with both the disease and the remedy; and who is not only able, but willing to present you faultless before the presence of his Father with exceeding joy.

Why then do you judge it "rather your duty to mourn than to believe; to feel the bitterness of sin, than to taste the sweetness of a promise; and to put away comfort lest it should check the overflowings of sorrow?" To souls under spiritual convictions of sin, be-

long all the consolatory promises that enrich the oracles of truth. The united powers of earth and hell can neither hinder their accomplishment, nor divest the soul of the right it has to the blessings they contain. What shall I then say to repress fear and encourage hope? To this inquiry the language of truth answers—"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned!" Surely these are tidings suited to distress—that must raise dejection from the dust, and inspire doubt with confidence! Come, then, "thou that art of a fearful heart, be strong;" this night of darkness is but a kind prelude to that lucid interval when Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, shall arise, and be as the light of the morning when the sun ariseth, even a morning without clouds.

The soul, emerged from nature's night,
Shall view the dawning ray,
With splendid beams of genial light,
Bring in the welcome day :
The healing sweets of Gilead's balm,
Thy wounded breast shall prove ;
And every ruder thought be calm,
Subdued by conquering love.

Let not unbelief suggest that the enjoyment of this delightful season is impossible; for

with Christ, the almighty Saviour, all things are possible. His resplendent beams can penetrate the dark recesses of the heart, dispel the gloomy horrors of guilt, and usher in the glorious, the welcome day of gospel grace. Then "fear not, thou shalt not be ashamed, neither shalt thou be confounded; for thy Maker is thy husband, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel."

Your present dejection may perhaps induce you to reply, "I wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but walk in darkness." Nevertheless, be not discouraged; the "Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God, thy glory." He will display the infinite freeness of his grace, and revive your disconsolate spirit with the manifestation of your interest in his love. His lenient hand will apply to the wounded conscience the pardoning blood of Christ, who is the great Physician that healeth all our diseases, that stills the surges of the mind. "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who can behold him?" If he but say, Peace, be still, there shall be a great calm.

Having, therefore, such a gracious and almighty Redeemer, let me entreat you to flee to

him for free pardon—for full redemption. Implore his omnipotent aid to banish every fear, to silence every doubt; and he will bring you off more than conqueror. The arms of his mercy are ever extended for the reception of sinners. He waits to be gracious. In him are safety and everlasting strength. He is the eternal God; he is the sinner's refuge—the hiding place—a sanctuary in the day of trouble.

Should you say, I am weak and helpless; let me ask with the prophet, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Now, is it possible to sink when upheld by Omnipotence? Can you faint under the benign influence of almighty succour? No, this is impossible; for thus saith the Lord, “I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God; I will strengthen

thee; I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Surely, words more animating and consolatory cannot be easily selected; they ensure safety in the most perilous situation, and support under the most pressing difficulties; and were it not for such exceeding great and precious promises, the trembling sinner might sink under the weight of his guilt, and fall into absolute despair.

But the Lord, who is rich in mercy, hath given ample ground for consolation to the soul that is burdened with guilt and struggling for deliverance. He hath provided and revealed a Saviour, who is not only able, but willing to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. No suppliant was ever driven from his throne, or sought relief of him in vain. The Pharisees did not utter a disgraceful, but a delightful truth, when they said of Christ, in a way of reproach, He receiveth sinners. The wretched and forlorn, the helpless and the hopeless, will meet with a kind reception. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Are you weary and heavy laden? Is conscience burdened with reiterated charges of guilt? Do you find yourself unable to support the ponderous load? If so, "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain you." Flee to this compassionate deliverer, this friend of sinners. Attend to the endearing declaration of his own lips: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Encouraging language, this. Surely it must rouse dejection from her torpor, and lay a foundation for hope in the most abandoned profligate on earth. Nothing can be more applicable to his wretched condition, nor better adapted to administer relief.

The Saviour's right of dispensing such incomparable blessings, originates in himself. No worthiness, foreseen in the creature, induced him to leave the mansions of glory to become the surety of sinners. His bearing that delightful character, and performing the arduous work pertaining to it, proceeded from his own sovereign grace. He voluntarily undertook the office of Mediator; and in his condescending to this work, "made himself

of no reputation; took upon him the form of a servant, and humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross." By this expiatory death, he finished transgression, and made an end of sin; satisfied all the claims of law and of justice on his people; blotted out the hand writing of ordinances that stood against them; and brought in an everlasting righteousness for their complete salvation. But this is not all that the divine Jesus hath done: he hath not merely cancelled our obligation to punishment as sinners—he has made ample provision for delivering his followers from the power of guilt, and the dominion of sin.

These are privileges, the conscious enjoyment of which would beggar all description. Your present fears may, perhaps, urge you to conclude that you shall never participate of these inestimable favours. But why not? Is the Lord's hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Hath he no power to deliver? At his rebuke, he drieth up the sea, and maketh the rivers a wilderness. The Lord will not despise the day of small things. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He will bind up the broken-hearted; proclaim liberty to the

captive; and open the prison to them that are bound. He will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; he will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will he do, and not forsake them. He that hath graciously begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. He is a rock, and his work is perfect. Grace in the heart is an earnest of glory.

Seeing, therefore, that we have such an almighty Saviour, let me entreat you to turn to him, the strong-hold, in the day of trouble; for he knoweth them that trust in him. "He shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." To the trembling sinner, these considerations must afford unspeakable encouragement; nor will it appear strange, when it is considered that he is not only delivered from the terrors of guilt, the bondage of corruption, the curses of a violated law, and that eternal punishment which is the just desert of sin, but is adopted into the family of God, and constituted an heir of glory. This is to be free indeed! These are immunities suited to the abject state of

man; they not only exonerate from condemnation and death, but raise to dignity and splendor—to consummate purity and everlasting blessedness.

Flee, then, to this Jesus—this city of refuge. Say, what makes you hesitate? Why let suspense engross the moment that comes winged with mercy? What! is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Yes; and such is the benignity of his heart, that when on earth he went about doing good; healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease. The errand on which he came, was an errand of benevolence; he announced publicly, in the synagogue at Nazareth, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord;” and is his arm shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Know you not that he ever liveth to make intercession, that he is able to save to the uttermost, that he is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins? “Ho! every one

that thirsteth," is the language of divine munificence; "Come, and take the water of life freely. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "He that believeth on me," as the scripture hath said, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

Should you say, in excuse for not complying with the benevolent invitation, I have nothing to bring that can entitle me to share the inestimable favour; suffer me to remind you, that the invitation extends not to those that are rich, but to him that hath no money; nothing with which to purchase the divine clemency, or to satisfy the claims of justice. The question in this case is not, "What am I worthy to receive; but, what has God graciously promised to bestow?" If, therefore, you are among the thirsty and the indigent; "Come, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Poverty of spirit, remember, is no bar to forgiveness. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." If there be one posture of the soul more lovely

and desirable than another, it is when at his footstool, in whose sight the heavens are not clean; when it can say, with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant;" or, with Job, "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth—I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

The language of your heart, my amiable friend, speaks poverty of spirit; to whom then should you go but to Christ, with whom there are durable riches and righteousness? "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me," is the language of Jesus, "and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live. Return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Would you experience peace of conscience, and communion with the Father of mercies? these inestimable blessings, remember, are only to be enjoyed through the medium of a Saviour's blood. "Without shedding of blood

is no remission. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Go to him, therefore, just as you are—as wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. He will clothe you with the garments of salvation. "I counsel thee to buy of me, saith the faithful and true witness, gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

In opposition to the freeness of grace, urge neither the number nor the magnitude of your crimes as a bar to forgiveness. This would be to act like the "timorous passenger who, in a storm at sea, makes it his only business to tell the waves, and to shriek at the beating of every billow against the ship; instead of imitating the industrious pilot, who hath his hand at the helm and his eye to heaven, and minds more his duty than his danger." Neither your thinking that pardon cannot be extended to a wretch so vile, nor the depths of

your despondency, can be admitted as evidence of your having no interest in divine mercy. Others have known what it is to groan, being burdened; and have cried in anguish of soul, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." No saint perhaps ever experienced more painful anxiety on this account, or exulted more in confidence of future glory, than the psalmist. "Will the Lord," he asks, "cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? O my God, my soul is cast down within me—all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

Now, unless it can be proved that divine grace is not free for you, and as competent to supply your wants as those of the royal

suppliant, your doubts must be groundless. The psalmist had no moral worth to encourage his approach to God for mercy, and on which to place his dependence for pardon and acceptance. He saw nothing in himself, as Du Bose expresses it, but ground for despair—the seduction of Bathsheba, the blood of Uriah, and the numbering of his people. He knew, if the Lord were to mark iniquity, that in his sight no man living could be justified. As to the depth of his contrition before conversion, we need say nothing; it is in this case quite sufficient for your encouragement that, though now a saint in glory, he was once a stranger to himself, and his carnal mind enmity to God; and in this awful situation are all the progeny of Adam without exception. The great God beholds from the height of his glory, all of them wandering far from him in the paths of iniquity and of death. Some wallowing in sensual pleasures; others delighted with gilded baubles exhibited by the world, to catch the eye and fascinate the heart. Some grasping after riches as the whole of human happiness; others climbing the steep ascent of honour and of applause; some busied about one thing, and some another; but none that seeketh after God; he

is not in all their thoughts. Everything else is viewed as desirable, and pursued with avidity; but the one thing needful is neglected or forgotten.

But while the objects of discriminating grace are, with others, thus wandering far from their heavenly Father in pursuit of sublunary bliss, he views them with unspeakable compassion; he stops them in their mad career, and says, by his word, or his providence, Thus far shalt thou go, but no farther. He shows them that they are walking in a path that is not good; he turns them back greatly ashamed, and mercifully brings them to the knowledge of himself, by a way which they knew not. But who, I ask, are the men whom the Lord thus turns from the error of their ways, and to whom he graciously makes known the benignity of his heart? Are such only, or principally, the objects of attention, who are comparatively moral and devout; who, because they are less vile than others, are more proud, and think that, in consequence of this negative goodness, they have a right to monopolize the felicities of glory? No; quite the reverse. Persons of this description are, in conformity to the estimate which they make of themselves,

denominated in scripture, whole—just persons that need no repentance; and before whom, publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven. “I came not to call the righteous,” said the compassionate Redeemer, “but sinners to repentance.”

To the same purpose speaks the great apostle of the Gentiles. “It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;” of whom, he immediately adds, I am chief. “Return, saith the Lord, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity; thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help.” To whom should you carry your complaints; to whom unbosom yourself, but to the Father of mercies? There is none else to deliver, and beside him there is no Saviour. Let not the number nor the greatness of your sins excite discouragement. When a profligate woman came to Christ, in the days of his humiliation, no mention was made either of the multitude, or the magnitude of her crimes; but the answer given to the Pharisee, who brought them as an objection against her, is,—“Her sins, which are many, are forgiven.”

As no comparative worthiness in the sinner can induce God to bestow mercy; so no

demerit can frustrate the benevolent intentions of divine goodness. Salvation is of the Lord; it is the effect of his own sovereign pleasure. To say, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," is the prerogative of Jehovah; and why the inestimable blessing should be conferred on any of the sons of Adam, no reason can be given but this; that salvation, in its origin, completion and bestowment, may redound to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Could you exhibit a catalogue of the blackest crimes that ever stained the records of history, or disgraced the character of man; these crimes could not be urged as too great, or too complicated for the blood of Christ to expiate. To a truth so animating, and so honourable to the riches of grace, the great apostle of the Gentiles repeatedly bears unequivocal testimony. Of this, we have a striking instance in his first admirable epistle to the Corinthian church. After having reproved the brethren for going to law with each other before the unjust, he reminds them of their former situation by reciting enormities, the commission of which had made them deservedly the reproach of men, and justly the objects

of divine abhorrence. "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Now, had the faithful remembrancer stopped here, we might, perhaps, have considered these Corinthian profligates as without the verge of divine forgiveness. But the sequel proves, that among these abominable wretches there were many vessels of mercy; and therefore he immediately adds—"Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

How wonderful the love, the grace, and the mercy of God! In this list of detestable criminals, we perceive sinners of every class; sinners of enormous magnitude, who, consequently, could have no moral worth to plead as a ground of forgiveness; and yet their filthy souls were washed in the blood of Christ—were justified by his righteousness, sanctified by his Spirit, and made meet for the enjoyment of heaven. Surely such incontestable instances of the aboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin, must constrain us to acknow-

ledge that Christ is able to save to the uttermost!

Having, therefore, indubitable evidence of the riches of grace in the salvation of such atrocious sinners, attempt not to limit its fulness or its freeness respecting yourself. Would you accept of pardon as revealed in the gospel for the relief of the guilty and the wretched, approach the mercy-seat just as you are. Carry with you all your sins—all your guilt, and frankly confess both before Him that searcheth the reins and the heart. Adopt the supplicatory language of David; “Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great,” or, rather, plead nothing in hope of forgiveness, but the blood of Him in whose name you are exhorted to come with boldness. Stretch forth the hand of faith; lay it on the head of Christ, who is a sin-bearing Saviour, and he will carry all your transgressions into a land of everlasting forgetfulness.

Should you imagine, for a moment, that this merciful High Priest will not receive you as a perishing sinner; attend to his own compassionate words: “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” Were you chargeable with the adultery of David, the murder of Manasseh, the apostasy of Peter, and the

blasphemy of Saul; the accumulated guilt of these atrocities could not be urged as an exception to the infinitely gracious declaration. Nay, were it possible to produce an individual the turpitude of whose actions would exclude from coming to Christ for mercy; or one that did come, and was afterwards rejected, the wonderfully encouraging assertion would not be true; nor could it be consistently affirmed, that he is able to save to the uttermost. But the Lord is the God of truth. "He is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent; hath he said and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" The works of nature may dissolve; nay they shall certainly perish; but the word of God remaineth sure, and his truth to all generations. The Lord hath graciously declared that he will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer; while, therefore, you acknowledge your unworthiness, and enumerate your own wants, remind him of his own promise; lest he should complain, and say, as he did in another case, "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, and hast not honoured me with thy sacrifices." No longer doubt the love of Christ revealed for

encouragement to the distressed and the guilty; reject the thought as highly dishonourable to God; and if the risings of hope be depressed by the prevalence of unbelief, pray that you may be enabled to give implicit credit to the testimony of his own word; that you may be helped to say with grateful confidence, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Your concluding, that there can be no mercy for such a detestable wretch as yourself, arises from ignorance, or inattention to the way in which the infinitely gracious God hath determined to save sinners. He is, remember, the "God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Instead, therefore, of ransacking the heart for pious dispositions, or of adverting to good works already performed, with a view to forgiveness; attend to the gracious and instructive language of Him that saith, "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour."

The unworthiness inseparable from depravity and guilt, is certainly matter of deep humiliation; but a conviction of this un-

worthiness, however pungent, ought rather to excite gratitude than despondency ; to rouse the torpor of dejection ; to impel the soul to be urgent for mercy, and to engender a hope that the kind hand which discovered the disease, will not long withhold the remedy. The testimony of God speaks louder than the most clamorous conscience ; and to this testimony, and this only, you must appeal in determining whether your fears be ill or well founded. If you search into the cause of your distress, it will, perhaps, be found to arise, not from a consideration of God's unwillingness to pardon ; not from any want of efficacy in the blood of Christ to cleanse the most polluted sinner ; but from a sense of having nothing to recommend yourself to his favour. It is a conviction of this fact that imperceptibly holds the soul in bondage ; that renders your taking encouragement from God's word altogether impracticable. Should you say, "No sins are like mine;" let me add, "There is no salvation like Christ's; his blood cleanseth from all sin."

If, however, you will not believe while your sins are so great, and your heart so polluted ; it is probable, were your heart less defiled, and your sins less in number, that

you would not believe in Christ at all. You would be more likely to trust in your own heart, and to rely on your own righteousness, instead of believing and trusting in Christ. Great sins and a bad heart, felt and bewailed, should operate in this case like hunger, which becomes an incentive to seek food. If men had clean hearts, it is very likely they would dispose of them otherwise, and rather think that Christ should come to them, than they to him. Instead of a man's poverty making him less desirous of relief, it should make him more importunate. To say, I will not come to Christ, because I have great sins, is as if one should say, I will have nothing to do with happiness, if offered, because I have great misery; I will not go to a surgeon for healing, because my wounds are so great; I will eat no bread, because I am ready to starve with hunger. This, surely, is bad logic; and it is not better to argue, Because I am filthy, therefore I will not go to the fountain to be cleansed.

“But, admitting that you are a great sinner, nay, one of the greatest; will your staying away from Christ make your sins less? Are you so rich as to pay the debt out of your own revenue? Or have you any hopes

of another surety? Can complaints of a great load, without endeavouring its removal, ease the shoulders that bear it? If your sins be so great, surely the Lord Jesus Christ, who is an almighty Saviour, and who delighteth in mercy, will not lose an opportunity of evidencing both his power and his pity on such a miserable subject; for, if there cannot be so great a sinner as you are, this is the last season he can have in which to display them!"

Ever since the fall of our first parents, all men invariably manifest a strong propensity to cleave to their own righteousness; to something they have performed, or are to perform, in order to final happiness. When a man contemplates the turpitude of his nature, and the imperfection of his conduct, he must, as a moral agent, be conscious of numberless defects; of being extremely culpable; and, as he cannot but acknowledge, on reflection, that his pravity has been the result of his own choice, it is quite natural for him to look to future reformation for something that may counterbalance his guilt, and avert the punishment he has reason to expect. Without revelation, he has no other medium by which to obtain forgiveness; and, if this revelation be neglected or despised, he will not see the

absurdity of his conduct ; his deceptive hope will keep pace with his diligence ; and, if divine goodness do not interpose, never perceive his mistake till too late to prevent it.

On this principle those Jews acted of whom it is said, "They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. They had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge ; for they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." But, before a man can cordially receive the salvation revealed in the gospel, every pretension to forgiveness, on the ground of human worthiness, must be entirely relinquished. "To talk of pardoning one that is innocent, or of forgiving a debt that never was contracted, is absurd in the extreme ;" it is, therefore, a part of the Holy Spirit's work to convince the sinner that in his flesh dwelleth no good thing ; that his own righteousness is as filthy rags ; and that, if he expects to be justified before God, all he has ever esteemed gain, in reference to this grand affair, must be esteemed loss for Christ.

"Heaven," says the very ingenious Spurstow, "stands like a little mark in a wide

field, where there are a thousand ways to err from it, and but one to hit it. Yea, though God hath said that there is but one sacrifice by which we can be perfected; but one blood by which we can be purified; but one name by which we can be saved; yet how hardly are the best drawn to trust perfectly to the grace revealed, and to look from themselves to Christ as the author and finisher of their blessedness! Seeing, therefore, Holy Father, that thou hast made the whole progress of salvation to be in Christ and by Christ; election to be in him; adoption to be in him; justification to be in him; sanctification to be in him; glorification to be in him; grant that, whatever others do, I may never choose the light of reason, but the Sun of righteousness to guide my feet into the paths of life; and that, both in life and in death, I may say as that blessed martyr did, ‘None but Christ, none but Christ!’”

While the awakened sinner surveys himself, he can meet with nothing but discouragement. If he look within, he perceives that the heart in which he trusted, has turned him aside; that it is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and the fruitful source of all the evils committed in his life. If he

advert to actions in which there was apparently nothing to blame, but rather everything to praise, he finds, on minute inspection, enough to convince him that he imperceptibly sought his own honour, and not the honour that cometh from God only. He feels that he is inwardly defiled; he is convinced that all his duties have been shamefully defective; he discovers nothing on which he can safely depend for pardon and acceptance. Like the unclean spirit, when dispossessed of his peaceful residence, he turns this way and that, seeking rest, but finding none; and the reason is obvious: he is looking for that in himself which is only to be found in Christ. Peace for a troubled conscience is not to be attained in this way; nor will the trembling sinner ever experience the inestimable blessing, till his attention is called from himself to the cross—till, as a perishing wretch, he looks to Him that said, when referring to his own death, “If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.”

The inquiry of a soul, in this perplexed state, is—how the Judge of the world can, consistently with the holiness of his nature, and the immutability of his truth in the threatenings, justify a sinner who, during his whole

life, has paid little or no regard to either. Now, in the cross of Christ, this question is explicitly answered—the whole mystery is completely developed. “He that commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shineth in the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The eye of faith discovers how God can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth. The just God and the Saviour are beheld with awful reverence and delightful astonishment! Tears of gratitude stream from the eyes of the adoring penitent; he looks upon him whom his sins have pierced, and mourns. “Surely,” he exclaims with the prophet, “he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. God forbid that I should henceforth glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ—who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

In the cross of Christ, the loving-kindness of God to man appears with meridian lustre.

By this despised means of human happiness, and this only, the divine perfections are glorified, and the chief of sinners saved. Not, be it remembered, by works of righteousness which we have done; for there is nothing we ever have done, or ever shall do, that can merit an interest in the divine favour. Suppose a character, among the apostate sons of Adam, in whom resides all the moral excellency that ever dignified human nature since the fall; and, on the other hand, one in whom concentrates all the moral evil committed since that fatal period; and it will be found on examination that, in point of justification before God, they stand on a perfect level. The accumulated virtue of the former, if pleaded as that which might render him acceptable to his Judge, would avail nothing; nor would the enormous guilt of the latter, simply considered, be an obstacle to the bestowment of grace and of glory.

Moral rectitude in all its forms, we ought, nevertheless, to admire, and studiously endeavour to cultivate. A disregard of this, where final, renders eternal happiness impossible, and condemnation absolutely necessary. That virtuous actions are praiseworthy in the sight of men, and, in a comparative view, in the sight

of God, is certain; but that these actions, however numerous, or however splendid, are of no use in the affair of justification is demonstrable; and it is this grand fact, and this alone, that abolishes, in a religious view, all human distinctions; that exalts the riches of sovereign grace; opens a door of hope for the guilty; and effectually secures all the glory of salvation to our adorable Immanuel.

That Christ is the only author of salvation, must never be forgotten. It may be said, in reference to all he did as Surety of the church, as well as to the complete conquest of his enemies: "Of the people, there was none with him; there was none to help, none to uphold; therefore his own arm brought salvation." The work of redemption was assigned to him in the everlasting covenant; it was what he then voluntarily undertook to perform, and what, as Mediator, he came to execute in the state of his humiliation on earth. By perfect conformity of heart and of life to the moral law; by suffering on the cross the dreadful penalty annexed to transgression; the stupendous undertaking was accomplished. That it was complete in all its parts we can have no doubt, because to this the divine Jesus bore unequivocal testimony when, in the agonies

of death, he cried, "It is finished; and gave up the ghost." As, therefore, he had no co-partner, no assistant in the work, we are not to imagine that he will give his glory to another. He that glorieth must glory in the Lord only. "We are not saved," says an apostle, "by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saveth us, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

The apostle, Paul, who made these assertions, and who laboured much in all his preaching and writings to establish the sovereignty of grace, is, in this affair, extremely tenacious of the honour of his Master. "Who," he asks, "maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" Sinners are not "called according to their works, but according to God's purpose and grace,

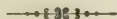
given them in Christ Jesus before the world began." Salvation is of grace; and if by grace, then, he adds, "it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more of grace; otherwise work is no more work." On this important subject, however, I cannot now enlarge: it shall, therefore, be resumed in my next.

I am yours, &c.

LETTER II.

What is all righteousness that men devise,
What but a sordid bargain for the skies ?
But Christ as soon will abdicate his own,
As stoop from heaven to sell the proud a throne.

COWPER



THAT good works can have no place in the justification of a sinner before God, was asserted in my last; want of leisure, however, prevented me from attempting to vindicate that assertion. I shall now, therefore, in pursuance of my promise, transmit my thoughts on this highly interesting subject.

Good works, performed by the apostate sons of Adam, have no intrinsic merit. The best performances of the most eminent saint are imperfect. They fall vastly short, both in motive and in practice, of what the moral law, which is the rule of duty, invariably requires; and can therefore have no influence

in the article of justification. Every man must see the absurdity of pleading the worth of partial and defective duties in order to answer the demand of a law that enjoins perfect and perpetual obedience. Nay, there never was, in fact, any period or situation in which the works of the first parent of mankind could deserve recompense. "For, having received all from God, he could display no excellence, nor communicate any favour, which was not derived from divine bounty. Far from increasing the glory or happiness of his Maker, he could only promote his own felicity and dignity, by exerting his powers in the service of Him who gave them."

Besides, if we hope to obtain compensation in a way of merit, our services must not be a debt previously due to him from whom the compensation is expected. But this is not the case with angels, much less with rebellious man, respecting the insulted Sovereign of heaven. We owe him ten thousand talents, and are absolutely insolvent; or to use the language of scripture, we have nothing to pay. The law of God, which is holy, and just, and good; which was adapted to promote our own happiness and his glory, we have violated in a thousand instances. Nor is this all; sin

has not only introduced disorder and misery into the moral world, but it has so far debased human nature, as to render us incapable, without foreign aid, of yielding that obedience which it is at all times, and in all circumstances, our duty to perform. This incapacity, however, which is purely moral, can by no means be pleaded in extenuation or excuse. Men “love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” All obedience or disobedience is properly, or at least primarily, in no part but the will; so that though other faculties of the soul in regeneration are sanctified, and thereby made conformable to the will of God, yet obedience and disobedience are formally acts of the will, and according to its qualities, a man is said to be obedient to God or disobedient. If therefore we have lost all inclination to obey the great Legislator of heaven and of earth, he has not lost his right to command universal and perpetual obedience. His law, which is the standard of perfection, and the rule of duty to moral agents, cannot, on that account, dispense with partial observance; nay, could we henceforth comply with all its requirements, we should do nothing more than our duty. Instead, therefore, of attempting to palliate the guilt

of remissness, we ought to cry with the trembling jailor, "What shall I do to be saved?" or in the more pertinent language of the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

That good works cannot be profitable to God, nor serviceable to man, in the important affair of justification, is a truth that extends to men of every description. The real christian, who is renewed in the spirit of his mind, and enabled to act on principles very different from men in a state of nature, can claim no exception; nay, it will be the language of his heart, "My goodness, O Lord, extendeth not unto thee." Morality, in this case, can have nothing meritorious in it; "it being," says a celebrated writer, "but wisdom, prudence, or good economy, which, like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God, than merits in us towards him; for though we may be justly punished for injuring ourselves, we can claim no reward for self-preservation; as suicide deserves punishment and infamy, but a man deserves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it."

"Can a man be profitable to God, as he who is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? Or is it any gain to him that

thou makest thy ways perfect? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him, or what receiveth he of thine hands? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man. Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever. What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" Instead, therefore, of attempting to claim the blessedness of heaven, on the ground of personal worthiness, it would be acting more in character for a sinful wretch to cry, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer; yea, twice; but I will proceed no further. Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Another reason why good works cannot be meritorious, is the vast disparity between them and the salvation they are supposed to merit. "A natural work can give no title to a supernatural reward." There must be a just proportion between the work and the

wages; if the wages exceed the work, they are so far gratuitous—favours to which we have no claim and of course not merited. But can the best services of a creature, depraved beyond description, be brought into comparison with the debt he owes to his Maker, or with that consummate happiness which in its duration is eternal? No; it is impossible. “The greatest human virtue,” says Dr. Johnson, “bears no proportion to human vanity.” Nothing short of an obedience commensurate to the requirements of divine law, and to the threatenings of eternal justice, can afford the sinner a well grounded hope of that blessedness which it is the glory of God to bestow as a gift; but which never was conferred on any as a debt, or as a recompense for diligence in duty.

Ascriptions of merit to man may be the language of mortals on earth, but it is not the language of saints in heaven. Concerning that great multitude which stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, not a word is said of their having deserved the honour and the happiness to which they were exalted; but, on the contrary, that they themselves “cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation

to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God, for ever and ever, Amen." Not an individual of that innumerable company is heard attributing his deliverance and his triumph to himself—to the possession of moral qualities, the performance of moral duties, nor yet to the patient endurance of great tribulation; but the reason given by one of the elders, why they were before the throne of God, and served him day and night in his temple, is this: "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The unanimous voice of the church militant and the church triumphant is, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and has made us unto our God kings and priests. Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

But while it is positively asserted that good works have nothing to do in the justification of a sinner before God, it is maintained with equal confidence, that there are other highly important purposes for which they are indispensably necessary. The scriptures declare that the elect of God are chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world ; that when the time to manifest this infinite grace is come, they are called with a holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace ; that they are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that they should walk in them.

That faith without works is dead is an established maxim with the christian. If there be time and opportunity, every believer is taught, by the Holy Spirit, to “maintain good works for necessary uses ; to let his light so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven.” In this case, faith and holiness are inseparable ; and it was a conviction of the importance of this truth, that induced the apostle James to ask, when writing to the Jewish converts, “Was not

Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" He knew there was a connection between the faith of which he then spoke and moral duties; that it would be as congruous to expect grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles, as to suppose faith in the heart unproductive of real holiness in the life. It is as "impossible for the sun to be in his meridian sphere, and not to dissipate darkness, or diffuse light, as for faith to exist in the soul, and not exalt the temper and meliorate the conduct." Faith, as a divine principle in the soul, purifies the heart; and is, in fact, the only source of good works. The tree must be made good before the fruit can be good. "But without faith it is impossible to please God;" and hence, we learn that Abraham's faith was prior to that striking proof of filial obedience by which he is said to be justified; and, therefore, neither the cause nor the condition of his justification.

In examining another part of the same chapter, we find the apostle asserts, when speaking of the extent and spirituality of the moral law, "that whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." Now as Abraham had, in many instan-

ces, violated this divine statute, his works could not so justify him, as to render him guiltless and acceptable in the sight of God. Throughout the whole of the apostle's reasoning there is a beautiful connection and consistency. For, by reciting the affecting story of Abraham and his beloved Isaac, he has shown, that by the venerable patriarch's obedience to the command of God, was manifested both the genuineness and the strength of his faith.

It is an article of the christian's faith, and from which he ought never to depart, that God, for the display of his own almighty power, sovereignty, and grace, does at the last hour, and perhaps in the latest moments, sometimes snatch sinners from the very jaws of hell, without any consideration as to moral worth, of what they have been, or what they then are. For the glory of infinite mercy, it may probably be said of numbers at the last day, as was said in reference to the ancient Jewish high priest, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Or at least this will be said of him whom the compassionate Saviour took from the cross to the crown—who was introduced in triumph to bear witness in heaven, as he had done upon earth, that salvation is not of works, but of grace!

What advantage, it may be asked, do those gain over their opponents who zealously maintain that good works are essential to salvation? For whatever is essential to the completion of any purpose cannot be relinquished. On this hypothesis, the salvation of the expiring thief was absolutely impossible. He had neither time nor opportunity to perform good works. Impossible also must it be to thousands, perhaps to millions, who have died, or may die, if not in similar situations, yet so circumstanced as to have no space for amendment; and equally impossible to infants, more than half of whom die before they are capable of moral action. This incapacity may probably be urged to prove, that, in reference to them, the cases are dissimilar; and that their not having committed actual sin, is a sufficient warrant to believe that they are not obnoxious to the divine displeasure. But this conclusion is not just. The scriptures positively declare, that we are by nature the children of wrath—that we are shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin—the offspring of a degenerate head, in whom we sinned, and from whom we derive pollution and guilt; and unless these facts be admitted, it is impossible to reconcile the conduct

of Providence with the oracles of truth; because death, which is the wages of sin, passes upon infants, though they have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression. But this would not be the case—it would be incompatible with divine goodness and the divine government, were they not federally connected with him, involved in his guilt, and the subjects of moral evil. “To deny the imputation of that offence, and yet grant, as it must be, that we suffer in consequence of it, necessarily supposes that we are condemned and punished, considered as innocent; than which nothing can be more unjust.”

But, were it admitted that there never existed any federal relation between Adam and his posterity, the difficulty with which the subject is supposed to be embarrassed would not be lessened. It is demonstrable, as far as cause and effect can be, that children are naturally depraved—that they are, without exception, agitated by sinful passions, long before the mind can possibly be influenced by example. Now, as these passions must arise from a corrupt principle latent in the heart, it cannot reasonably be denied, that defiled nature in an infant is, in its degree, as inconsistent with the purity and felicity of heaven, as that which

is peculiar to those who have committed actual transgressions; and that the comparatively small depravity of the one will as effectually bar the way to blessedness, as the enormous load of the other.

But heaven and glory are not to be obtained by any of the sons of Adam, on such conditions. They possess no moral qualities that merit the divine favour, nor that fit them to enjoy it. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Grace reigns—and is, I have no doubt, glorified in the salvation of infants; and it will reign, and will be glorified in all that are finally saved. He, therefore, who shall think that, because he has lived to augment his debt, he has thereby increased his capacity for payment, will find himself at last—more than insolvent! I am, said Jesus, the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me: and he that shall presumptuously attempt to climb to heaven in any other way, will be treated as a thief and a robber.

Were justification by works, either in whole or in part, what encouragement could I administer to you, whose distress originates in a conviction of having none to plead as a ground of forgiveness? What could he say that is

called to the bed of a wretched sinner, who, in the prospect of death, is alarmed with a consciousness of enormous guilt—of having lived without God in the world, and of being shortly to appear before him as his Judge? or what to the condemned criminal who, the next hour, is to pay his forfeited life to the laws of his country, as the only possible expiation of his crimes against society? He must leave them both a prey to dejection and sorrow: he could not, consistently with his own principles, say any thing either to remove the pangs of guilt, or to assuage the horrors of despair. The hopeless delinquents might each, in their turn, adopt the expostulatory language of Job: “How hast thou helped him that is without power? how savest thou the arm that hath no strength? how hast thou counselled him that hath no wisdom? How forcible are right words! but thou art a miserable comforter—a physician of no value.”

But while it is maintained that salvation is entirely of grace—that good works have nothing to do in the justification of a sinner before God—that dying infants are redeemed from sin and all its consequences by the blood of Christ; and that it is possible for the most notorious offender to be saved, even at the last

hour; it is, at the same time, affirmed with equal confidence, "that God never intended mercy as a sanctuary to protect sin"—that this doctrine gives to the sinner, continuing in sin, no reason to expect forgiveness: nay, the want of an habitual disposition to keep the divine commands, is unequivocal proof of his being in a state of spiritual death, and of his having no evidence that he shall ever experience the blessing of pardon. Divine grace is a "vital, active, influential principle, operating on the heart, restraining the desires, affecting the general conduct, and as much regulating our commerce with the world, our business, pleasures, and enjoyments, our conversations, designs, and actions, as our behaviour in public worship, or even in private devotion."

There are some, indeed, who "retire from the world, not merely to bask in ease or gratify curiosity; but that, being disengaged from common cares, they may employ more time in the duties of religion; that they may regulate their actions with stricter vigilance, and purify their thoughts by more frequent meditation. To men thus elevated above the mists of mortality, I am far from presuming myself qualified to give directions. On him that appears to pass through things temporary, with

no other care than not to lose finally the things eternal, I look with such veneration as inclines me to approve his conduct on the whole, without a minute examination of its parts; yet I could never forbear to wish, that while vice is every day multiplying seducements, and stalking forth with more hardened effrontery, virtue would not withdraw the influence of her presence, or forbear to assert her natural dignity, by open and undaunted perseverance in the right. Piety practised in solitude, like the flower that blooms in the desert, may give its fragrance to the winds of heaven, and delight those unbodied spirits that survey the works of God and the actions of men; but it bestows no assistance upon earthly beings, and however free from taints of impurity, yet wants the sacred splendor of beneficence."

He that is commanded to let his light so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven, cannot descend from the conspicuous situation in which he is placed, without leaving his post, and incurring the charge of cowardice, if not of desertion. The wicked, indeed, flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion. They are to be

steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and the man who is born of God, and mercifully reserved to bear testimony in the world to the riches of sovereign grace, will demonstrate, by his conduct, that sanctity of heart and of life is inseparably connected. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." They reckon themselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ. The heavenly seed, in this case, cannot but be productive of fruit. There are no barren trees in God's vineyard, or, at least, none of his planting; and even in those persons who are naturally incapable, or who have no time allotted for demonstrating the salutary effects of divine culture, the same immortal principle is implanted; the image of Christ is stamped on the soul; and though the impress be not perceptible to human view, it will, nevertheless, hereafter appear with his likeness.

To be delivered from the condemnation and dominion of sin in the present life, to rejoice in the glorious liberty of the gospel, and to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man, are privileges that the heirs of glory ardently desire to enjoy, and which

they consider as the summit of earthly blessedness. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? "He that hath tasted the bitterness of sin, will fear to commit it; and he that hath felt the sweetness of mercy, will fear to offend it!"

As the saints are made, through grace, heirs according to the hope of eternal life, they zealously contend, and constantly declare, that those who have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works. But then that love of holiness, and this zeal for the honour of God, arise, not from an expectation of being justified, either in whole or in part, by their personal conformity to the moral law; but from a heartfelt conviction that these things are in themselves lovely, as well as good and profitable to men.

The believer, like the great apostle of the Gentiles, "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus; for whom he can cheerfully suffer the loss of all things, and reckon them but dung, that he may win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Like his divine Master, he finds it his

meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father. But were he to do all that is commanded, or that inclination or gratitude might prompt him to perform; yet would he say, I am an unprofitable servant, I have done that only which it was my duty to do. He feels sin to be his heaviest burden, and holiness his principal delight. He presses toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; anxious that he may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and be made conformable unto his death. He knows that in his flesh dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with him; but how to perform that which is good he finds not. He feels a perpetual conflict between the flesh and the spirit, that mars every duty; which makes him dissatisfied with himself in every attainment; and this dissatisfaction and that conflict will continue till he be divested of the body of sin and death. But when mortality is swallowed up of life, then shall he awake in the likeness of Him to whose image it will be his glory and his happiness to be eternally conformed.

The followers of Him, who went about doing good, are taught to distinguish between

good works, which are the fruit of divine grace imparted to the heart, and that expiation by which forgiveness is obtained at the hand of God. In all they do, they act, or ought to act, from a principle of love. They know that their best services constitute no part of their salvation; yet are they assiduous in the performance of every branch of duty, desirous that they may be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they shine as lights in the world." The practice of virtue stands as a discriminating mark of their being disciples of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. But in this they have learned not to glory. They constantly declare that their endeavours to honour the government and grace of God, arise not from depraved nature, but from the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which hath made them free from the law of sin and death; and who, as their Head, worketh in them both to will and to do. It is a sense of continual dependence on his gracious influence, that keeps alive the sincerest gratitude; that lays them in the dust; which teaches them to glory in the Lord

their strength; in whose name it is their privilege constantly to rejoice, and in whose righteousness alone they shall be everlastingly exalted.

If the disciples of Jesus see others running in the broad way that leadeth to destruction, their sorrow is excited; they attribute no merit to themselves; but, on the contrary, adore the restraining and the sanctifying hand that has made the difference—which has not permitted them to wallow in the mire of sin, nor to run into the same excess of riot. Sin is that which the new man created in Christ Jesus abhors. The followers of the despised Galilean are, like their divine Master, nevertheless, stigmatized as friendly to sin. But it is an indubitable fact, that he who is born from above, delights in the law of God after the inward man. The uniform language of the redeemed on earth is, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Should you ask, Are all who profess the name of Christ thus minded? There are who will tell you, “even weeping,” that many, very many, are otherwise minded; that they mind

earthly things, turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, trample on the blood of the covenant, glory in their shame, and are altogether enemies to the cross of Christ. They name the name of Christ, but depart not from iniquity; they cause the doctrine of God to be blasphemed, and his ways to be evil spoken of; so that those that are without, become presumptuous, and are not afraid to speak evil of the things which they understand not.

But, notwithstanding this repugnancy of principle to practice, surely it will be acknowledged, that the abuse of a doctrine is no proof of its being false. What truth of revelation, what precept in morals, what art, what science has not been perverted by either the ignorance or the obstinacy of some of its advocates? There have always been "vain talkers and deceivers, who have professed to know God, but have in works denied him;" but was it ever concluded from the inconsistency of such characters, that atheism was rational?

The doctrine of salvation by grace has generally been treated with contempt by men of the world; and has, indeed, sometimes been abused by those from whom better things might have been expected. But the notoriously wicked, who seem as if studious

to evince their having no desire of maintaining good works, are frequently the most clamorous against it. If we are not to be saved by works, we may, it is said, live as we list; we may sin that grace may abound.

“Adieu! Vinosa cries, ere yet he sips
The purple bumper trembling at his lips;
Adieu to all morality! if grace
Make works a vain ingredient in the case.”

But the conclusion is false: it is a vile slander on the conduct and character of God. As if he, in whose sight the heavens are not pure, should redeem the vessels of his mercy from all iniquity, in order that they might continue to commit it; or were to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, with a view to their wallowing at pleasure in defilement!

“Loudly have opponents exclaimed, that the doctrines of grace enervate the obligations of morality, by rejecting the claims of human merit, by exhibiting a full and perfect atonement for all crimes, and by denying that good works are essential to salvation. But though a christian will not admit that man can merit anything from his Creator, he is far from denying that there are different degrees of

worth and excellence in human characters. Nor does the righteousness of a Saviour imply any dispensation from the eternal and immutable obligations to virtue, but rather enhances their force, by showing the dreadful effects of their violation, and by rendering the infinite love and grace of their divine Author more conspicuous." It may be said, without being chargeable with bigotry or presumption, that he who shall venture to abuse the mercy of God, because it is great, or the grace of God, because it is free, never felt his utter unworthiness of either; has never tasted that the Lord is gracious: he is in a state of spiritual death; the guilt of sin is upon him; and he may rest assured, that unless he so feel its pressure as to groan for deliverance—as to hate the sin, as well as the punishment connected with it; except he experience a sincere love of holiness, and of entire conformity to the moral image of Christ, he has no ground to hope that he shall ever awake with his likeness.

When we seriously reflect on the present state of man as a moral agent, and as accountable for his conduct to God, the Governor of the world, it is, in one view, astonishing that an individual should be found unfriendly to the doctrine of salvation by grace. But, alas!

so blind and prejudiced by nature is the human mind, that this way of escape from deserved ruin, though exactly suited to his wretched condition, and the only means of deliverance, is nevertheless rejected and despised. Christ becomes a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; and the presumptuous sinner, going about to establish a righteousness of his own, will not submit to be justified by that righteousness which divine mercy hath graciously provided. To search into the cause of this melancholy fact, we must advert to the primeval state of our first progenitors; but I have already trespassed too long on your patience: the subject shall, therefore, be resumed in my next.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing heavenly Muse—————

MILTON.



OUR first progenitors, when recent from the hand of Omnipotence, were perfect models of human excellence, possessed a nature untainted by sin, and capacitated to abide in the perpetual enjoyment of paradise. But, alas! the trial of their filial obedience soon terminated in the most heinous act of rebellion. Their listening to the vile insinuations of Satan, opened a door for the entrance of sin, the existence of which was immediately evidenced by actual transgression. Thus were their understandings darkened, their affections depraved, and the condition on which felicity was pro-

(100)

mised completely violated. The loss of original rectitude rendered all their future services imperfect, and, of course, inadequate to secure the happiness formerly annexed to obedience. Perfect obedience and perfect happiness were inseparably connected.

But this offence was not attended merely with a privation of present happiness; it was a forfeiture of all claim to future blessedness. Our first parents stood as condemned criminals at the bar of their beneficent Creator; and in consequence of their detestable ingratitude, became obnoxious to the punishment threatened in case of disobedience to the divine precept. But the evil did not terminate with them. Adam stood as the federal head of the numerous posterity that should spring from his loins; they were considered as one with him, as interested in his happiness. The forfeiture, therefore, of God's favour, which was his proper life, extended itself to all his natural descendants. They were involved in his guilt, and subject to the same condemnation. "The violation of that original covenant not only polluted and disarranged the constituent principles of his nature, but impressed the same hereditary stains on all his descendants, and subjected

the whole progeny to those penalties which had been incurred by its first propagator."

Thus, Adam, having by transgression virtually renounced his allegiance to the best of sovereigns, became the vassal of that treacherous adversary who, by the power of temptation, had stripped him of all his pristine glory and happiness. He forsook the standard of his beneficent Creator, and enlisted under the banner of Satan. After his example all his posterity naturally copy. They cheerfully obey the crafty dictates of the same tyrannical sovereign. It is said, without exception, "They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." They are led captive by "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." All the powers and faculties of the soul, and all the members of the body, are under his control, and devoted to his service. "God is not in all their thoughts—nay, the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

It is allowed, indeed, that there is a vast disparity, as to moral turpitude, between the actions of individuals. Some men, in a com-

parative view, may be properly denominated virtuous, and others completely vicious; and the number of those is not small, "who regulate their lives, not by the standard of religion, but by the measure of other men's virtue; who lull their own remorse with the remembrance of crimes more atrocious than their own, and seem to believe that they are not bad while another can be found worse." Very different, however, were the conclusions of the learned and excellent Boerhaave; who relates, that he never saw a criminal dragged to execution without asking himself, "Who knows whether this man is not less culpable than I?" But the concession I have made does not in the least militate against the doctrine of universal and equal depravity; because every perceptible gradation of excellence arises, I presume, not from one man being less corrupt than another, but from the interposition of God, operating by natural causes, with a view to subserve his own glory in the government of a world entirely under the dominion of sin. Every christian may with propriety say, If I have not, like David, committed murder and adultery, nor with Peter, denied the Lord that bought me, it is not because my nature is less depraved, but because

I have been either kept out of the way of temptation, or preserved from falling by it.

The interposition of God in restraining the evil propensities of human nature is strikingly exemplified in the character of Hazael. After Elisha, the prophet, had answered the inquiry of Benhadad the king of Syria, he fixed his countenance steadfastly on the messenger, and wept. Then "Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel; their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."

When Hazael heard the predictions of the prophet, he was, I have no doubt, struck with horror. He never imagined that he could be capable of perpetrating such outrageous acts of barbarity. But the sequel demonstrates, that the seeds of all these atrocities were latent in his nature. The Almighty withdrew the restraints by which his depravity was bounded. The hour of trial speedily occurred; the next

day he murdered the king his master, and reigned in his stead; and afterward, fulfilled all that Elisha had predicted.

It was said by one, well acquainted with human nature, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." The salutary caution is the language of wisdom and benevolence. The best of men, when left to themselves, have given awful proof of their incompetency to withstand temptation. Witness the case of Hezekiah, whom God left to try him, that he might know the corruption of his heart; and it may repress the vanity of self-confidence to recollect, that an apostle was, as Dean Young expresses it, pious in the house, courageous in the garden, and, in the hall, both a coward and a traitor.

That the all-wise Governor of the universe is pleased, for purposes of his own glory, to restrain the passions of men, is clear from the case of Abimelech respecting Abraham; and also from these words of the psalmist: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain;" and, perhaps, both these clauses, and also the principle on which I reason, were never more awfully, nor more clearly exemplified, than in the character and conduct of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Man is not only dreadfully depraved, but is said to be without strength, to have no understanding. "He receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "Nor is it strange that the natural man should not discern the things of the Spirit; for, in all other cases, a simple perception can only be excited by its proper object. The ideas of sound and colour, of proportion and symmetry, of beauty and harmony, are never found in the mind, till the objects by which these pleasing sensations or emotions are inspired, have been presented to our observation. How then shall we rightly apprehend the nature and effects of communicated grace before they are felt? Or how can we explain to others sensations for which language has no words, and to which the persons whom we would enlighten, have no feeling analogous in their own minds?"

The language of the heart of a natural man to God is, "Depart from me; for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." I say the language of the heart; because the existence of this diabolical aversion is by multitudes peremptorily denied. But every act of sin is

rebellion against the authority of God in his law; a contumacious disregard of the sanctions by which it is enforced; and while men indulge themselves in criminal pursuits, in vain do they disown the being of a disposition hostile to the divine character. There have always been men that have professed to know God, but who have in works denied him: and, while this ignorance and aversion continue, the sinner will persevere in the paths of iniquity and of death, suspecting neither danger nor deception. "Though he walk in the imaginations of his heart, to add drunkenness to thirst, yet doth he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace." Self-love flatters him with undoubted assurance of mercy. Imagination pictures a God all benignity and love. No regard is paid to his truth and his holiness as Rector of the world; nor is it remembered that it is in the nature of things impossible divine justice should, without satisfaction, remit punishment where transgressions are committed.

If the deluded sinner become at all serious, and the thought of eternity obtrude on his reflection, and disturb his quiet; he purposes amendment of life, as the most likely means of making God propitious.

“Remorse begets reform. His master lust
Falls first before his resolute rebuke,
And seems dethroned and vanquished”—

This alteration of conduct, joined to the mercy of God, will, he thinks, completely save him, though it be at the last hour. If, however, conscience do her work faithfully, he is exceedingly alarmed: he begins to proportion his diligence to his danger, “and purposes,” as Hawkesworth expresses it, “more uniform virtue and more ardent devotion, in order to secure himself from the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched;” but until convinced by the Holy Spirit that “all his righteousness is as filthy rags,” he is never brought, even at the last extremity, to reject his own supposed moral worth.

Such are the views, and such the principles, on which the natural man reasons, when guilt arrests the conscience, and the salvation of his soul becomes a matter of serious inquiry. The tear of sorrow is to purchase oblivion for the past, and future reformation to merit the felicity of heaven. He never considers that the imperfection of his duties renders eternal blessedness in this way unattainable. But when the Spirit of God strips him of all his imaginary excellence, and shows him that the

divine law is spiritual; that it requires perfect purity of heart as well as of conduct, he then sees that he is indeed "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." He cries, in the anguish of his soul, What! will nothing that I can do entitle me to happiness? If so, "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?"

Such is the inquiry of an awakened soul: and such, Lavinia, I know is the language of your heart. While, therefore, I am endeavouring to answer the inexpressibly important question, pray "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."

In attempting this, we must return to that once happy paradise, where our first parents forfeited their title to present and to future happiness. Here, while lamenting over their apostasy from God, we discover the interposing hand of divine mercy extended to administer relief—to point the way to "a paradise," as Witsius expresses it, "far preferable to the earthly, and to a felicity more stable than that from which Adam fell. Here a new hope shines upon ruined mortals, which ought to be

the more acceptable, the more unexpected it comes. Here conditions are prescribed, to which eternal salvation is annexed; conditions, not to be performed again by us, which might throw the mind into despondency; but by Him that would not part with his life before he had truly said, *It is finished.*” No sooner is the rebellion of our apostate ancestors acknowledged, than a Saviour is graciously promised — “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.”

The promulgation of this act of grace was the effect of everlasting love, and also a declaration of the future incarnation of the Son of God; which incarnation was, in the first ages of the church, prefigured by various types and shadows, “but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. In the eternal covenant of grace, all things were settled and provided for the redemption of man. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The divine Redeemer foresaw the wretchedness and the ruin to which the members of his mystical body

would be exposed, in consequence of sin ; and in order to rescue them from this ruin and that wretchedness, he voluntarily sanctified himself, or, in other words, “gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour.” He most cheerfully engaged as a substitute for the guilty, and undertook to redeem from death and all its consequences, the many sons he was appointed to bring to glory.

In a compact so characteristic of the Father of mercies, it appears, from scriptural representation, to have been stipulated, that the Son of his bosom should take the nature of man into union with his divine person ; “that he should, in that nature, bear the sins of many, be numbered with transgressors, make his soul an offering for sin, finish transgression, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness ;” and, as a reward for the work he was to perform as Mediator, his eternal Father promised, “that he should see his seed ; should prolong his days ; should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied ; and that the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands.” In consequence of his own engagement and of this promise, the compassionate Saviour

saith, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."

To accomplish the astonishing work of redemption, the Son of God must become incarnate; assume the nature that had sinned, and in that nature make complete reparation to the law which his people had grossly violated; for, without reparation, no sinner could be saved. As a transgressor, he must inevitably have perished; or the divine law have relinquished its claim on him as a debtor; which, in the very nature of the case, was impossible. No law, human or divine, founded in justice, and given as a rule of moral conduct, can dispense with a breach of its commands. Were a desperate assassin to plunge a dagger into the bosom of his most inveterate enemy, the law of his country would demand his life, as an atonement for the crime; it could not do otherwise. It is allowed, indeed, that the murderous villain might escape the penalty of death, by the intervention of a pardon; but for this pardon he would not be indebted to the benignity of the law, but to the unjust interposition of his prince. The law would remain invariably the same; it must ever view

him as a notorious transgressor ; and unless its requirements be granted, or its violated honours amply restored, oppose all his efforts to obtain liberty or to preserve life.

Now thus it stands with sinful man respecting the great Governor of heaven and of earth. The divine law, which was given as a rule of conduct, has been broken in a thousand instances ; and its language to the candidate for eternal happiness, on the ground of human worthiness is, "Pay me that thou owest !" "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." This demand is founded in equity, and can neither be evaded nor complied with by the culprit ; he lies under an arrest of justice ; and unless the demands of the claimant be answered by the sinner, or his substitute, he must remain perpetually a debtor, and feel the weight of its sentence for ever. "Without an adequate atonement," says the ingenious Blacklock, "no sinner can possibly escape the hands or elude the awards of justice. But such a compensation can by no means be given, if the delinquent's capacities of suffering be limited, or his station and character of no higher importance than those of his brethren ; for the malignity of moral evil is too diffuse

and permanent to be cured by any exemplary punishment, whose duration and extent are circumscribed. Even penitence itself cannot obliterate the evils which it deplures. Transgressions already past, and recorded in the books of heaven, are not to be reversed by resolutions of future reformation. The purest virtue of which human nature is capable, extends not to the sanctity of those laws which are prescribed for its obedience. Our best actions demand the exertions of mercy and forgiveness; how then can we atone for those that are bad?"

Let it, therefore, be remembered that on the ground of personal desert no sinner can be saved. This is absolutely impossible; and the reason is obvious. He has violated the divine precept, and no future conduct, however exemplary and exact, can atone for crimes previously committed. "The punishment of vice," says Mr. Jenyns, "is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation; repentance can be no compensation; it may change a man's dispositions, and prevent his offending for the future; but can lay no claim to pardon for what is past. If any one, by profligacy and extravagance, contract a debt, repentance may make him

wiser, and hinder him from running into further distresses; but can never pay off his old bonds, for which he must be ever accountable, unless they are discharged by himself, or some other in his stead." As, therefore, a continuance of happiness was conditionally annexed to perfect and perpetual obedience only, that happiness cannot be enjoyed without entire conformity to the conditions on which it was promised. The scriptures positively assert, "that the whole world is become guilty before God—that, by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. If, therefore, righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain!"

But to make this matter, if possible, more plain, let it be considered that man either is or is not dependent on God. If dependent, which is the fact, for independence is peculiar to Jehovah, he must be a subject of moral government; for no reasonable creature can exist without being subject to some law expressed or implied; nor can there be a law without a penal sanction. This is absolutely impossible; because the law that requires supreme love to any object as a duty, must, as "it cannot be framed on principles of compas-

sion to guilt," necessarily condemn hatred or opposition to it as a crime. If, therefore, it was right, in the first instance, that man should love his Creator, and conform to the precepts given as the standard of obedience, it must be right to inflict the penalty annexed to transgression.

If, then, it be allowed that man is accountable to the Almighty for his conduct; that the rule of duty is founded in righteousness; and that he has violated this rule; it is, I think, demonstrable that, if salvation by Jesus Christ be rejected, he must suffer the penalty of the law—or, in other words, he must inevitably perish. This conclusion appears to me indisputable.

The moral law, which is a transcript of the divine purity, is, we are told by one well acquainted with its perfection and extent, summarily comprehended in love to God and love to man. It enjoins nothing but what is absolutely good in itself—what is adapted as much for the creature's happiness, as for the glory of the beneficent Creator; nor does it prohibit any thing but what is positively evil—what is naturally ruinous to the soul and body, as well as derogatory to the supreme Governor of heaven and of earth.

Now, in attending to this incomparable law, there is no fear of excess. "In the love of God," says one, "there can be no possibility of exceeding, while there is no limitation in the command; nor are we in danger of loving our neighbour better than ourselves; and let us remember that we do not go beyond, but fall short of our duty, while we love him less."

The holy and blessed God will not, nay, he cannot, absolve a rational creature from obligation to the precepts of the moral law; for this would be a practical declaration, that aversion from himself, and hatred of our neighbour, are no crimes. It is therefore a capital mistake to imagine, that the righteous Legislator of the universe may, or may not, punish sin. Punishment is, in this case, not an act of sovereignty, but necessarily results from the supreme perfection of God. Sin is the abominable thing that his soul hateth; it cannot exist but in opposition to the purity of his nature, and the rectitude of his government. While, therefore, it is suffered to remain in his dominions, it must be the object of his abhorrence; and what, as Ruler of the world, he cannot but punish either in the person of the sinner, or in his substitute. Were a con-

sideration of this awful fact suffered to impress the mind as it ought, we should see our situation to be dreadfully calamitous—that in ourselves we are utterly undone. The necessity of a Saviour would be at once apparent; and instead of attempting to extenuate the guilt of sin, or of cavilling against the infliction of punishment for it, we should adore the wisdom and the grace that devised and promulgated the means by which it is forgiven.

It must be obvious to him who shall duly consider the perfection of the divine nature, and the rectitude of the divine government, that the law under which our first parents were, both as a covenant and as a rule of duty, must be perfectly fulfilled, previous to the bestowment of heavenly blessedness on their apostate descendants; for without such fulfilment, this blessedness never could, consistently with the rights of holiness and of justice, be enjoyed. The law could never remit its claim to universal obedience, nor, as such, suffer the offender to escape with impunity.

It is, however, proper to remark, that mere obedience, were it absolutely perfect, could not, circumstanced as we now are, be viewed as an adequate reparation for the insult and injury done to the divine government. The

penalty connected with disobedience must also be endured; and both in the nature by which it was first dishonoured; because angelic obedience to the same commands, would not answer the requisitions of a statute, given as the rule of human duty. As, therefore, we are all breakers of the divine law, and as no future conformity to its precepts, were it absolutely perfect, can compensate for this violation, we are all inevitably undone, if not interested in the righteousness and propitiation of Jesus Christ.

Of the need we stand in of this propitiation, and of that righteousness, there can be doubt, if the remarks made on the divine law, and the divine government be accurate. By the law, we are told, is the knowledge of sin. By this rule we discover what is duty, or, in other words, what is prohibited; what is commanded, and the penal sanction by which obedience is enforced. In the scriptures of truth, the fatal consequences of our apostasy from God are affectingly described; and the plan formed by infinite wisdom and infinite goodness for our delivery from eternal ruin, graciously revealed. So that while we sorrow after a godly sort, we are not like those that have no hope; we have, it is true, destroyed ourselves, but in the Lord are our help and our deliverance found.

Cheering, however, as this delightful truth certainly is, yet it is too commonly neglected or despised. Men are unwilling to think themselves so degenerate as represented by the sacred writers, or to believe there is that intrinsic evil in sin which is constantly affirmed. Hence the objections against the spirituality, purity, and extent of the moral law; the substitution and the atonement of Christ; and also against other glorious truths inseparably connected with the redemption of man. But these objections must be considered in my next. Till then, believe me very sincerely,
Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

—————Man disobeying,
Disloyal breaks his fealty, and sins
Against the high supremacy of heaven,
Affecting Godhead, and so losing all,
To expiate his treason hath nought left,
But to destruction sacred and devote,
He with his whole posterity must die ;
Die he or justice must ; unless for him
Some other able, and as willing, pay
The rigid satisfaction, death for death.

MILTON.



THAT a condemned rebel should reject a pardon, which exempts from sufferings and from death ; that he should ungratefully treat with ridicule or with insult the herald who announced the merciful intelligence, and obstinately choose rather to run the risk of escaping deserved ruin by his own projects, than to accept deliverance by the merciful interposition of his prince, is a phenomenon in

the criminal world, that must excite astonishment and nonplus credibility.

But what less do those who disregard the righteousness and the atonement of Christ, who represent the scriptures that inculcate the salutary doctrine as absurd, and who presumptuously seek to escape final perdition on the ground of personal worthiness? Few, indeed will be found hardy enough to commend the conduct of such a contumacious wretch, though they manifestly act on the same principle. It can scarcely be imagined that those persons to whom Solomon (or rather Solomon's antitype) has reference, were so audacious as to declare in so many words—that they paid no regard either to the reproof or counsel of God: and yet their conduct is interpretatively exhibited to show that this was the genuine language of their tongues and of their hearts. “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning; and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you.

Because I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

I know it has been asked, Is not God infinitely merciful? may he not therefore glorify his name in saving sinners on the ground of mere mercy without the intervention of an atonement? If the reasoning in my last be just, certainly he cannot; and this will appear very evident, if it be considered that mercy has regard to the object as miserable—not to his guilt, which is the source of his misery.

"To pardon sin, as an absolute act of mercy, would be a total neglect of holiness, which is no more possible with God, than it is to put

forth acts of power without wisdom. Now, the manifestation of divine holiness, in relation to guilt, can only be in the infliction of deserved penalty. As he cannot act powerfully without the exercise of infinite wisdom; so he cannot act mercifully without manifesting his infinite holiness. But to forgive sin, as an act of absolute mercy, would not be an act of holiness; and therefore no such act of absolute mercy is possible with God."

Besides, if an atonement for sin be not indispensably necessary to forgiveness, the incarnation—the life—the sufferings—and the death of Christ were superfluous; because whatever was requisite to qualify a sinner for the enjoyment of heaven might, on this hypothesis, have been effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit. But, in addition to this gracious work of the divine Comforter, there are other offices to perform. He is to take of the things of Christ, and show them to the church; to bring all things, in reference to his mediation, to remembrance; and to apply his blood to the conscience, which operations necessarily involve an atonement. If the way was so short, that by pure favour, without satisfaction, sin might have been pardoned; why, says Dr. Bates, should the infinite wisdom of God take

so great a circuit? The apostle Paul supposes this necessity of satisfaction as an evident principle, when he proves wilful apostates to be incapable of salvation, “because there remains no more sacrifice for sin;” for the consequence were of no force, if sin might be pardoned without sacrifice, that is, without satisfaction.

If Jesus Christ satisfied not for us, says the eloquent Daillé, what mean the prophets and apostles, who proclaim at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of all their preaching, “that he died for our sins, was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; that the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed; that his soul was made an offering for sin; that he is our propitiation, through faith in his blood; that he is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world; that he offered up himself a sacrifice for sins, and sanctified us by this oblation, and purged away our sins by himself?”

There are but three ways in which a sinner can hope to escape final perdition: namely, by personal conformity to the moral law, the absolute mercy of God, and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

As to the moral law, that excludes all expectation of blessedness. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for, the just shall live by faith. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight."

With regard to the mercy of God, that, I have already observed, has relation to the object as miserable—not to his guilt.

In reference to the righteousness and atonement of Christ, these lay a solid foundation for hope. He is "God's righteous servant, by the knowledge of whom, many are justified. Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many—he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself—and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Your friend, Theron, I know, will treat this consolatory doctrine with contempt and with ridicule. To suppose, it is said, that God will mark with rigorous exactness the deviation of his creatures from the strict rule of duty, is to impeach the divine goodness—to represent the Almighty as inexorable and cruel; especially when it is considered that human nature is frail and imperfect; that the commission of particular sins is only a compliance with natural propensities; and which, therefore, if not free from blame, can never be viewed as enormities of such magnitude as to incur everlasting displeasure.

Were I to suppose that Theron might impose on your simplicity and your candour by “partial representations of consequences, intricate deductions of remote causes, or perplexed combinations of ideas, which, having various relations, appear different as viewed on different sides; yet what must be the event of such a triumph? A man cannot spend all his life in frolic; age, or disease, or solitude will bring some hours of serious consideration; and it will then afford no comfort to think, that he has extended the dominion of vice, that he has loaded himself with the crimes of others, and can never know the extent of his own

wickedness, nor make reparation for the mischief that he has caused. There is not, perhaps, in all the stores of ideal anguish, a thought more painful, than the consciousness of having propagated corruption by vitiating principles; of having not only drawn others from the paths of virtue, but blocked up the way by which they should return; of having blinded them to every beauty but the paint of pleasure, and deafened them to every call but the alluring voice of the sirens of destruction."

But in the appeal which your friend has made to the clemency of our beneficent Creator, no regard is paid to his holiness or his justice; to his truth and faithfulness as the moral Governor of the universe. Considered in this light, his sovereign authority must operate by no rule, but must bend to the corrupt passions and inclinations of men; nay, it must, in fact, relinquish its claim to obedience, and the Maker of all things become himself subject to the caprice of his own creatures!

The drunkard thinks it hard that his momentary intemperance, which is injurious to no one but himself, should be regarded as unpardonable indulgence. The thief can never believe that his forcibly taking from others what he considers as superfluous, in order to

supply his own absolute wants, is a crime that calls for the interposition of vengeance. Thus, respecting every species of iniquity, and through all gradations of guilt, each transgressor has, in his turn, a thousand arguments to plead in extenuation of his crimes; and these arguments, if not sufficiently weighty to balance his guilt, ought, he thinks, so far to prevail as to secure him from final perdition. Every man becomes his own judge, and imagines himself possessed of both capacity and right to decide in his own cause.

Now, according to this hypothesis, there is no fixed standard of right and wrong. There must be as many laws by which to judge, as there are individuals to be judged. The great Arbiter of the universe can give no award. He has erected his tribunal in vain; and must either tamely acquiesce in the sentence which the criminal himself shall pronounce, or be stigmatized as a merciless tyrant.

“If,” says a sensible writer, “the feelings of every man’s mind were to be the standard of obligation, what duty that crosses their inclinations will men perform, or what vice that flatters them will they forego, for the sake of what others call reason, and in deference to an equivocal authority, arising from what

philosophy itself, which hath talked most loudly about this authority, hath not agreed to give any name or definition to! For every man's own feeling, that is, his inclination, will be his standard of duty, without a settled law to which to appeal, a fixed and decisive criterion of good and evil, in spite of all the fine things that have been said on the beauty of virtue, fitness and unfitness, the moral sense, and all

—‘ which Theocles in raptured vision saw.’ ”

When men of this description are told of their situation and their danger, nothing is more common than for them to reply, God is merciful; but “this,” as an ingenious writer expresses it, “is a false and fatal application of a divine and comfortable truth. Nothing can be more certain than the proposition, nor more delusive than the inference. The truth is, no one does truly trust in God, who does not endeavour to obey him. For habitually to break his laws, and yet to depend on his favour; to live in opposition to his will, and yet in expectation of his mercy; to violate his commands, and yet look for his acceptance, would not, in any other case, be thought a reasonable course of conduct, and yet it is

by no means as uncommon as it is inconsistent.

“But the life of a dissipated, or rather a nominal christian, seems to be a perpetual struggle to reconcile impossibilities: it is an endeavour to unite what God has for ever separated: peace and sin; unchristian practices with christian observances; a quiet conscience and a disorderly life; a heart full of this world and unfounded dependence on the happiness of the next.”

That all attempts to separate what God has joined together, are as impious as they are vain, you need not be told. “Christianity must be embraced entirely, if it be received at all. It must be taken without mutilation, as a perfect scheme, in the way in which God has been pleased to reveal it. It must be accepted, not as exhibiting beautiful parts, but as presenting one consummate whole, of which the perfection arises from coherence and dependence, from relation and consistency. Its power will be weakened, and its energy destroyed, if every caviller pulls out a pin, or obstructs a spring, with the presumptuous view of new modelling the divine work, and making it go to his own mind. There is no breaking this system into portions, of which

we are at liberty to choose one, and reject another. There is no separating the evidence from the doctrine; the doctrines from the precepts; belief from obedience; morality from piety; the love of our neighbour from the love of God. If we profess christianity at all, if we allow the divine Author to be indeed unto us wisdom and righteousness, he must be also sanctification and redemption."

That all appeals to the absolute mercy of God, unconnected with his holiness and his justice, are not only fallacious, but impious in the extreme, and as inconsistent with the first principles of justice, as they are repugnant to the oracles of truth, is demonstrable. If sin be really hateful to God, and incompatible with the perfect purity of his nature; if it be inimical to the happiness of the universe; the source of all the misery felt on earth or experienced in hell; and a transgression of a law that is denominated holy, and just, and good; surely it cannot be unjust to punish it! The penal sanction of the law, as recorded by an apostle, runs thus: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Now this awful sanction is just, or it is not: if it be just, it cannot be unrighteous to enforce it; if it be

not perfectly equitable, it was an act of injustice to appoint it. One of these consequences must follow.

Was the divine Lawgiver sincere? I ask. Did he or did he not mean what he said when he prohibited sin, and annexed a penalty to the precept? If sincere, if really in earnest, his truth, in case of transgression, stands engaged to inflict the punishment incurred.

“If God, like man, his purpose could renew,
His laws could vary or his plans undo ;
Desponding faith would droop its cheerless wing,
Religion deaden to a lifeless thing ;
Where could we, rational, repose our trust,
But in a power immutable as just ?”

To suppose, that He who is emphatically styled the true and faithful witness, should bear testimony to a falsehood—should be guilty of such duplicity as would stamp infamy on the character of a man, is shocking—is blasphemy. “God is not a man, that he should lie ; neither the son of man, that he should repent ; hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne ; he will judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth.”

That the mercy of God is great, even from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him, is a delightful truth. But this mercy is not manifested in a way that has the least tendency either to countenance or to extenuate the malignant nature of sin; but in a way that exhibits the infinite wisdom and benevolence of God—that evinces the purity of his nature, and the rectitude of his government. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” The saints are said to be “blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ; in whom they have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, and are made accepted in him the beloved.” In the cross of Christ, mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Here we behold, with astonishment and with gratitude, the just God and the Saviour! And he that shall hope for mercy in any other way, will find that he has deceived his own soul; “for there is salvation in no other, nor any other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

This, however, is a way of saving sinners, that mortifies the pride of man. It implicates

him in extreme depravity, and abominable guilt; it strips him of all his supposed excellency, and in the grand article of justification before God, places him on a level with harlots, publicans, and profligates. It attributes nothing to great natural abilities, shining talents, eminence in science, philosophy, or literature—to the possession of immense riches, extensive influence, or the pomp of princely magnificence; these are adventitious circumstances that have no influence in the momentous transaction. Though charity have founded a thousand hospitals, erected a thousand edifices for benevolent purposes, and supplied the wants of millions, she cannot commute for one sin, nor by these acts of splendid munificence, contribute anything to facilitate acceptance with God. No moral worth, though the only thing that stamps intrinsic value on any character, and one grain of which is ten thousand times more excellent than all the elegant accomplishments, or the useful acquisitions ascribed to man, can plead a right to share the inestimable blessing. These are not actions, nor qualities for which apostate men are raised to the dignity of sons of God, and made heirs of an everlasting kingdom. Honours and privileges like these, claim a divine origin;

nor will he that shall happily experience the unutterable felicity, either here or hereafter, hesitate to sing with the church triumphant—"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen."

Salvation is a gift freely bestowed on man, not as deserving it—not as being merited by the performance of certain duties, but as a grant of absolute grace through Christ. The praise, the honour, and the glory belong to him—not to the sinner; and the invaluable blessing must be received, if received at all, as that for which the recipient has paid no equivalent, performed no stipulations—as a gift gratuitously conferred on a wretch that deserves to perish.

This is a way of deliverance from eternal ruin that is honourable to all the perfections of God, exactly suited to the abject condition of man, and without which he must inevitably perish. But though it be so completely fitted to expiate his guilt, to relieve his wretchedness, and restore him to purity and to happiness; yet the methods that infinite wisdom has adopted to effect it are so degrading to human

pride, so diametrically opposite to the ideas men entertain of their own dignity and virtue, that it is frequently either wholly neglected or treated with scorn.

It may, perhaps, be asked, Is it not unwarrantably censorious to ascribe dislike to this way of salvation to the pride of man? But to what else can it be attributed? I appeal to the candour of those who oppose the salutary truth, and ask, whether they do not really think that there is something in their virtue and their piety which God must regard, and for which he will be finally propitious? Now, if this be the case, the doctrine of mere grace must of course be viewed with a frowning aspect, because it indicates total depravity—entire helplessness: it resists all claims to merit, and excludes every degree of regard to human excellence: it proceeds on a supposition of there being nothing good in man, which is a degrading fact that is not credited. It is, therefore, quite natural for men with such sentiments, to explode the doctrine altogether; and it would be consistent and honourable, frankly to acknowledge that, in opposing it, the principles of self-importance did imperceptibly operate, and that, therefore, it is no breach of christian charity to attribute aversion from it to the influence of these principles.

The doctrine of the cross has ever been, to them that perish, foolishness. The ancient Jews required a sign, and the learned Greeks sought after wisdom: Christ became to both a stumbling stone and rock of offence. He was beheld as a root out of dry ground; as having no form nor comeliness—no beauty to render him desirable. The means, when compared with the end, appeared hateful to the Jew, and absurd to the Greek; but to them that believed, “both Jews and Greeks, Christ became the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

It is a lamentable fact, that the generality of those persons who are perpetually talking of the mercy and goodness of God, are very far from being eminent for sanctity of life. It should seem, therefore, from this circumstance, that there is a strong propensity to believe, either that sin is not so hateful as represented, or that the Almighty will not finally punish it. But this is an awful deception. “He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with him.” It is a fact—an incontestable fact, “that God is angry with the wicked every day—that he will by no means clear the guilty.” That the soul that sinneth shall die, is the irrevocable decree of heaven. Men may attempt to extenuate the

turpitude of their own actions, and “bless themselves in their hearts, saying, We shall have peace, though we walk in the imaginations of our hearts, to add drunkenness to thirst: but the Lord will not spare them. He will render to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.”

The profane scoffer may walk after his own lusts, and insultingly ask, in the language of similar characters of old, “Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it! But the Lord is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness; he will be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy, sanctified in righteousness.” Whatever the incorrigible sinner may think, his “damnation slumbereth not; the day of his calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon him make haste.” Divine justice is not asleep, but watchful. The Lord is a God of know-

ledge, and by him actions are weighed. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good ; “ Whence it is evident, that God not only can know, if he will, but likewise, that he actually wills to know all that we do.” He is a Judge, “ infinitely wise, and infinitely powerful ; whom the sinner can neither deceive, escape, nor resist.” Not a word, not a thought eludes his notice. All deviations are faithfully recorded ; and a tribunal erected where, as one expresses it, the proofs for conviction are ready to produce, the evidence unexceptionable, and the awards of justice exactly proportioned to the guilt. Though “ the adulterer wait for the twilight, and disguise himself,” yet shall he not avoid detection ; “ the hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light ; for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed ; neither hid, that shall not be known. Whatsoever has been spoken in darkness, shall be heard in the light ; and that which has been spoken in the ear, in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house tops.”

“ That dreadful evil, which, with equal force and propriety, is called the second death, should not, surely, be disregarded, merely because it has been long impending ; and, as there is no equivalent for which a man can

reasonably determine to suffer, it cannot be considered as the object of courage. How it may be borne should not be the inquiry ; but how it may be shunned. And if, in this daring age, it is impossible to prepare for eternity without giving up the character of a hero, no reasonable being, surely, will be deterred by this consideration from the attempt ; for who but an infant, or an idiot, would give up his paternal inheritance for a feather, or renounce the acclamations of a triumph, for the tinkling of a rattle ?”

The truth is, all men by nature possess a radical aversion to the government of God. They practically say concerning him, as the Jewish nation did of Christ, “We will not have this man to reign over us ;” and the reason is obvious ; his word, like that of the prophet to the king of Israel, never speaks good to them, but always evil. There is, therefore, a perpetual contest between him and them for sovereign dominion ; or, as Charnock expresses it, “Whose will and whose authority shall stand.” As Rector of the world, he has enacted a law worthy of infinite wisdom, and of infinite benevolence, that is adapted to promote the divine glory and the happiness of man. But this law, since the fall, though supremely excellent

in itself, is so repugnant to the propensities of depraved nature, that it is constantly opposed ; is represented as rigorous and cruel ; as not suited to man in his present circumstances ; and, therefore, incompatible with the benignity of God. The heavenly statute is treated as an obsolete rule, and the will of perverse mortals set up as the standard of duty ; or at least the authority of the divine Legislator in the law is trampled on without regret, and the vilest atrocities frequently committed without remorse and without shame.

Let it, however, be remembered, that one grand end of the incarnation, the sufferings, and the death of Christ, was to honour the divine government. The objects whom he came to redeem, were violators of the law of God, and subject to its curse. As delinquents, it had a legal claim upon them ; which claim was a bar to bestowment of happiness. In order, therefore, to remove this impediment, he, as their Surety, conformed to all its precepts in his life, and suffered its penalty in being made sin and a curse for them in his death. Now Christ, in bearing this curse, practically declared, both to angels and to men, that the law which denounced it is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good ; that the per-

sons for whom he died, deserved to suffer its penalty ; and that they could not, consistently with the honour of the divine government, possess the kingdom prepared for them till this curse was entirely removed.

If the purity and perfection of the law of God be not fully admitted ; if the curse it pronounces on the sinner be not strictly equitable, the death of Christ, as an expiatory sacrifice, was the most unjust, and the most cruel event that heaven or earth ever witnessed ! What need was there for such an expiation, if man could have been saved without it ? To imagine that the Father of mercies required the death of his own Son to atone for crimes which the law could not righteously punish, or which could have been remitted in a way less rigorous, is such an impeachment of the divine wisdom and the divine goodness as excites horror.

But the period is swiftly approaching, when all the impious cavils of men will be effectually silenced ; when it shall be made manifest that the government of God is according to truth. “Think not,” said Christ, “that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets ; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil ; nor shall one jot, or one tittle pass from the law till all be fulfilled.” A day is appointed of God in

the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man who died to maintain the rights of divine justice. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." And who so fit to vindicate the divine government, or to administer divine justice, as he who voluntarily laid down his life in obedience to that law which thousands wantonly contemn, but by which, however reluctant, they must finally be judged?

It has been supposed, that one reason among others, for which a judgment day is appointed, is for putting honour on the Son of God. "It is highly proper," says the ingenious Dr. Smith, "that this holy and divine person, who was buffeted and affronted, condemned and crucified by an ungrateful and injurious world, should now judge his judges, and be as far advanced above the pinnacle of human greatness as he was once below it. It is fit that Herod may see that he persecuted, not the infant king of a petty province, but the Sovereign of angels and of men; and that Pilate and the Jews may be convinced, that he whom they called a king in scorn, is really a greater emperor than Cæsar."

I am yours, &c.

LETTER V.

—————be thou in Adam's room
The head of all mankind, though Adam's son.
As in him perish all men, so in thee,
As from a second root, shall be restored
As many as are restored ; without thee none.
His crime makes guilty all his sons ; the merit
Imputed shall absolve them who renounce
Their own both righteous and unrighteous deeds.
And live in thee transplanted, and from thee
Receive new life.—————

MILTON.



HAVING sent you in my last, a few remarks on some of the objections raised against the perfection and extensive demands of the moral law, the righteousness and atonement of Christ ; I shall now proceed to state more fully how the astonishing work of man's redemption was effected.

What I have already said concerning the apostasy of man, the corruption of his nature, his aversion from God, and his utter inability

to rescue himself from deserved ruin, will, I trust, evince the absolute need in which we stand of a Mediator, or as Job expressed it, of a daysman, who can lay his hands on both parties—the offender and the offended. And it is our happiness that the Son of God viewed us in this helpless condition; that in order to snatch us from a situation which involved perpetual destruction, he graciously took on him —“not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham; and was made in all things like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

The doctrine of redemption, though generally neglected, is of the last importance to man. This is the “salvation of which the prophets inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us; searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.” This is the mystery into which angels are represented as having been anxiously desirous to look; but which, fully to comprehend, they must descend from celestial

regions to learn on earth, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God. And, indeed, who so fit to announce the incarnation of the Son of God, as those inquisitive spirits who had long witnessed his glory in heaven; who owed to him the confirmation of their blessedness; who, from the beginning, had been employed as ministering spirits to those whom he left his Father's bosom to redeem; and who always felt themselves deeply interested in the promotion of his glory and in the happiness of man?

When the birth of Christ was first proclaimed, "there were shepherds," it is said, "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid." It may be thought perhaps, that the shepherds of Judea need an apology for manifesting any trepidation on such a joyful occasion; but who could have seen such a messenger and beheld such splendor without astonishment and without dread? The benevolent herald, however, neither expressed surprise nor waited for excuse; but kindly hastened to remove the tremor that his presence had produced. "And the angel said unto them,

Fear not; behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Who can for a moment contemplate this wonderful intelligence, and not exclaim with the devout psalmist, "Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man that thou makest account of him!" "Herein is love," says an apostle, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." "He was given for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes; to bring out the prisoners from the prison; and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."

To accomplish the work of man's redemption, the Son of God left the bosom of his Father, and, though "equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became

obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Should it be asked why the Lord Jesus condescended to take our nature into union with his divine person, the answer is—It behoved him to be made like unto his brethren: or, in other words, it was to qualify himself for the arduous work he had graciously undertaken to perform—that the divine law might be magnified in the same nature by which it was first dishonoured—"that he might by the grace of God taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

For these beneficent purposes the Son of God became incarnate. "He was made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them

that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." He voluntarily became subject to its precepts and obnoxious to its penalty; and, as the Head of his body the church, was obedient, suffered, and died. He is, therefore, emphatically styled, the second man—the Lord from heaven. The first Adam was the natural and federal head of his posterity: he did not act simply as an individual, but as the representative of mankind; consequently what he did in his own person, was, in one view, considered as done by them. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners. By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Now had our first father retained his primitive integrity, his offspring would undoubtedly have participated of his happiness: but as he apostatized from God, they were of course involved in the same guilt, the effects of which are daily experienced in a thousand forms, and which, together with actual transgression, remain on all his natural descendants.

Now, by the assumption of human nature, the Lord Jesus Christ became our near kinsman, whose right it was to redeem. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. We are members of his body, of his flesh, and

of his bones. He is the Head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body." But prior to this astonishing act of condescension, the church was viewed as having a representative being in Christ. As Mediator and Head of the church, he was set up from everlasting—he was the Father's elect, in whom his soul delighted. The elect are said to be "given to him before the foundation of the world: to be chosen in him: to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: and to have grace given them in him before the world began." Christ and his church were considered as one mystical person.

For this church he "gave himself; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, and present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." He became "the repairer of breaches;" or, in other words, he undertook to do all that the elect ought to have done in their own persons, and to suffer all that they might have eternally suffered as the just demerit of their sins. To speak in the astonishingly emphatical language of scripture—"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and

the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He came to give his life a ransom for many—to suffer the just for the unjust—to bear our sins in his own body on the tree—to be made sin and a curse for us—to pour out his soul unto death—that he might finish transgression, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness.” Well, therefore, might the divine Jesus say, when instituting the ordinance in which his followers were to commemorate this wonderful transaction till his second coming, “This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins: this do in remembrance of me.” To which an apostle adds, from the same authority, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come.”

Now, what the Lord Jesus Christ did and suffered, was not on his own account, but on account of his body the church, of which he was constituted the representative. For if the Saviour of mankind be viewed simply as an individual; if we detach from his character, as Mediator, the ideas of substitution and imputation—the imputation of our sin to him, and of his righteousness to us; the unparalleled sufferings he underwent, had they been

ten thousand times greater than they actually were, can avail us nothing—they can have no reference to us; nor is it possible, without including these important facts, to account for the astonishing language of the divine Father, when he said concerning him, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, against the man that is my fellow; smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” Admit but the engagements of Christ as a surety, and there is no obscurity. “He became answerable for our debt; the debt was exacted, without the least abatement. In this respect God spared not his own Son.” It is the federal relation which Christ sustains, that made the first Adam a striking figure of him that was to come; and is indeed the true reason why he is expressly denominated the second Adam. It is by the offence of one, that judgment came upon all men to condemnation; and it is by the obedience of one, that many are made righteous. “Take away the circumstance of substitution, and there is no more ground for reliance on the obedience of Christ, than for reliance on the obedience of Gabriel. We are made the righteousness of God, because we are in him, as our proxy and our head. Because he wrought the justifying righteousness,

not only in our nature, but in our name, not only as our benefactor, but as our representative."

That the Redeemer of mankind acted, and was treated throughout the whole of his humiliation, as the Surety of sinners, will appear abundantly manifest, if it be remembered that in him personally considered, "there was no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he was smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed; for the transgression of my people was he stricken." His immaculate life and expiatory death "magnified the law and made it honourable." The divine statute received at his hands, as the Surety of the church in our nature, ample reparation; and this obedience and this death, are the only ground of an awakened sinner's hope of mercy and of pardon.

Now, when a sinner believes the record, "that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son;" when he looks to Calvary, and views the suffering Saviour as

wounded for his transgressions, as bruised for his iniquities, the law which, as a covenant of works, held the soul in bondage, ceases to harass and distress. He sees all its claims on him as a debtor, completely cancelled by the payment of his adorable substitute; nothing left for him "either to suffer or to do, in order to acquire either exemption from punishment, or a right to life." An acquittal from guilt and condemnation is announced to the conscience; and he perceives with astonishment and gratitude, that the great Lawgiver of the universe, in whose sight the heavens are not pure, is nevertheless a just God and a Saviour!

Permit me, therefore, to repeat, that justification is not to be obtained by the works of the law, by any performances of ours, but by a righteousness which, in opposition to the righteousness of men, is expressly called "the righteousness of God—even the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, for there is no difference." Him hath the divine Father "set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbear-

ance of God ; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness ; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then ? It is excluded. By what law ? of works ? Nay ; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

By this work of our heavenly Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, "that holy law which we have broken is highly honoured ; and that awful justice which we have offended is completely satisfied. By this righteousness the believer is acquitted from every charge, is perfectly justified, and shall be eternally saved. In this consummate work, Jehovah declares himself well pleased, and in it all the glories of the Godhead shine. Yes, the obedience of our adorable Sponsor is perfect as divine rectitude could require ; and excellent as eternal wisdom itself could devise. Admirable righteousness ! who, that is taught of God, would not, with Paul, desire to be found in it ! and who, that is conscious of an interest in it, can cease to admire and adore the grace that provided, and the Saviour that wrought it?" "Surely," shall one say, "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength ; even to him shall men come ; and all that are incensed

against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory."

To this almighty Saviour, our original and offending parents were mercifully directed for relief. To set before them the gracious design and end of his coming in the flesh, proper means were instituted. All the sacrifices that were offered to God under the various dispensations of grace, had reference to him as their antitype. But, by reason of the imperfection which was natural to them as types, they could answer no higher end than to point the sinner to this bleeding Lamb, figuratively slain from the foundation of the world. The Jewish rites and ceremonies, though of divine origin, were only shadows of good things to come; and, therefore, could never remove guilt from the conscience. The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did—which hope is Christ. To him, the bleeding sacrifice, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, the eye of faith ever looks for pardon and for peace. Through him is communicated every spiritual blessing. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge. He is the fountain of life, and the source of felicity. He is

peace to the troubled, and rest to the weary. To all that seek him sorrowing, he is their exceeding joy and great reward. These are the lambs that he carries in the arms of his mercy, with whom he delights to dwell, and to whom he graciously saith in his word, "Son, daughter, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven.

This is the voice that soothes the pangs of grief,
That yields the burdened conscience sweet relief;
Oh! could my friend the matchless bliss explore,
Her trembling heart would disbelieve no more;
Her doubting breast would then with rapture move,
And mourn the tenders of neglected love.

Look, therefore, to this almighty Saviour—this friend of sinners—thou prisoner of hope. He is not only our advocate with the Father, against whom we have sinned, but the propitiation for our sins. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law

of Moses." Neither the number nor the magnitude of your sins forbids your approach. Were none but the comparatively worthy encouraged to come, vain man might think he had whereof to boast. But in the affair of salvation, the Lord hath purposed to stain the pride of human glory, and to bring into contempt those things that are generally considered as establishing a kind of title to his favour and forgiveness. For were any other plea than sovereign grace, through the blood of Christ, admitted in the court of heaven, the self-righteous moralist might glory in his doings; the wise man in his wisdom; and the mighty in his strength. But as nothing done by man can in the least conduce to his justification before God, we must conclude with the apostle, and rejoice in the conclusion, "that salvation is of grace—not by works, lest any man should boast." The inspired writer felt for the honour of his divine Master, as well as for the souls of men; and while he laboured to preserve the gospel in its purity, he showed the arrogant their danger, and exalted the riches of grace, by opening a door of hope for the chief of sinners.

When the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Surety of the church, had finished the work which the

Father gave him to do, he ascended up on high as a triumphant conqueror. "He led captivity captive ; he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them on the cross ;" and when he entered the mansions of blessedness as a public person—as our forerunner—it was proclaimed throughout the heavenly regions, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors ; and the king of glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory ? The Lord, strong and mighty ; the Lord, mighty in battle."

Such was the reception with which the despised Galilean met in the realms of glory ! This was a part of the joy that was set before him, for which he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. For this exaltation he ardently prayed during his abasement on earth. "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come : glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. I have glorified thee on earth : I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world

was." He prayed to Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared. "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This Jesus, remember, is possessed of sovereign dominion. All power in heaven and in earth is given unto him. He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. He has commanded, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations;" and to this command annexed, for the encouragement of his faithful ministers, a promise that he will be with them alway, even unto the end of the world. Now, to this almighty Saviour, this Prince of peace, who sits as a priest upon his throne, you are encouraged to come. In his name you may confidently trust; for, "by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." If, then, all power in heaven and in earth be in his

hands, and to be used as he pleases—if his blood, as the Redeemer of mankind, cleanses from all sin, and his righteousness, as a substitute, justifies the ungodly—if he is the resurrection and the life, and it is true, that whosoever liveth and believeth in him shall never die—if he has invited sinners to come to him for complete salvation, and has said without limitation and without exception, “him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out”—what should hinder your approach? It is still, and ever will be the language of his heart, while there is a redeemed sinner upon earth—“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”

From considerations so animating, the dejected christian perceives there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared. Neither the multitude nor the magnitude of his sins gives reason for despair. The price of his release from condemnation is already paid by the blood of Immanuel. Not a sin remains uncan-

celled—unforgiven, and he may rest assured of a full and everlasting discharge from the accusations of a guilty conscience, and from the righteous claims of a violated law. The work of Jesus as a surety is complete—is all-sufficient; so that the believer may say, in reference to his interest in the perfection of his work, as the apostle did concerning the supply of his own necessities, “I have all, and abound;” for what can he want, to whom Christ is made of God wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?

I am yours, &c

LETTER VI.

—————Believe and live—————

Too many, shocked at what should charm them most,
Despise the plain direction and are lost ;
Heaven on such terms ! they cry with proud disdain,
Incredible, impossible, and vain !

COWPER.



THE fears suggested in your last, in reference to pardon, evince a suspicion that the love of God cannot be extended to any objects except those who are, in some way or other, more deserving than yourself. You are ready to say, “Had I a heart to love God like David, had I talents to glorify God as Paul, were I like Nathaniel, an Israelite without guile ; then might I hope, with them, to have my imperfections pardoned, my person accepted, and my services rewarded. But this heart, with which I should love God, is carnal and not spiritual ; my talents and abilities, with which he should be glorified, are few, if any. My sincerity,

which should be conspicuous in every duty, is strongly tinctured with hypocrisy and selfishness. With what confidence then can such a wretch draw near to Christ, or ever expect a welcome reception?"

But this reasoning is fallacious; it proceeds, not on the ground of justification being an act of grace to the absolutely unworthy, but a reward conferred in consequence of pious dispositions or devotional duties; than which nothing can be more erroneous nor more dangerous. The supposition is repugnant to the very genius of the gospel, which signifies glad tidings, good news. But would either of the epithets accord with the wonderful intelligence, if, in order to share the invaluable blessings it reveals, the man to whom this gospel comes must previously possess inherent righteousness, or evince by exterior conduct that he really deserves it? "Can he be clean before God, that is born of a woman? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Circumstanced as we now are, the tidings, so far from being good, would be quite the re-

verse. I say, quite the reverse; because, to be interested in the good they contain, I must be the subject of qualifications which I never had, which I am unable to acquire, and which no human efforts can produce. A consideration, therefore, of my own deficiency, respecting these prerequisites, and of my utter inability to remedy the defect, would have a natural tendency, not to excite hope, but to generate despair.

What qualifications did Saul of Tarsus possess when the glory of Christ shone into his heart on the road to Damascus? He says himself, in reference to this astonishing transaction, I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy. "These," says a celebrated foreigner, "are the preparatory deserts the apostle produces; for nothing intervenes between his having been all this, and his obtaining mercy, as the cause, or as fitting him for it; and had he been guilty of adultery, of drunkenness, and of perjury, he could and no doubt would have said, I Paul, the adulterer, the drunkard, the perjured wretch, obtained mercy."

What moral qualifications did the Saviour of sinners find in the unchaste Samaritan with whom he graciously entered into familiar con-

versation at Jacob's well ; to whom he revealed himself as the Messias, who asked, and received of him that living water which she found to be as a well springing up into everlasting life ?

What evidence, either of compassion or compunction, did the jailor at Philippi manifest to Paul and Silas, previous to the earthquake that shook both his prison and his conscience ; and to whom, in the distraction of inquiry, they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ?

What previous qualifications had those Ephesian converts, who were quickened when dead in trespasses and sins ; or those highly favoured Romans, who, when enemies, were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ? What moral worth was beheld in Zaccheus, in Matthew ? But why do I select Saul of Tarsus, Zaccheus, or Matthew, the woman of Samaria, the jailor at Philippi, Ephesian or Roman converts, as instances of unparalleled unworthiness ? All the world is become guilty before God ; there is none righteous, there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Is it not a lamentable fact evinced by the testimony of scripture, and the sad experience of the saints, "that in our flesh dwelleth no

good thing? That when we would do good, evil is present with us, so that we cannot do the things that we would? We are carnal, sold under sin; we are not sufficient to do anything as of ourselves, but are absolutely without strength." So far are we from having naturally any real love to God, that the "carnal mind is enmity against him;" we do not love to retain him in our thoughts.

Now this is not the case with a part of mankind only, nor are these things said of a few individuals notorious for acts of atrocity, but of every man without exception. The defection is universal. The saints themselves are involved in the guilt, and are by nature children of wrath, even as others. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God;" and what was the result of this survey? They are, it is said, "all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one—every mouth, therefore, must be stopped—for by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight."

The sovereignty of divine love, and the riches of divine grace, are eminently conspicuous, not in Christ's dying for persons com-

paratively righteous, but in this—"that when we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Besides, the very term Saviour, as it respects man, implies his lost condition. For if, by any means of his own devising, he could have delivered his soul, or have given to God a ransom for it, the angelic heralds would not have been commissioned to proclaim, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. The song of praise is an implicit declaration that salvation is of the Lord; that the glory of its contrivance, as well as of its completion, wholly belongs to him; and that the promulgation of this salvation is the only way in which peace with God is made known to man; by which it is enjoyed in the conscience on earth, or experienced in all its plenitude in heaven.

Permit me, therefore, to repeat, that divine love, as exercised toward sinners, did not originate in any real or supposed comparative excellence in any of its objects, but in the good pleasure and sovereignty of God. Men were viewed as depraved and guilty—as altogether unworthy; and so circumstanced that all, if such had been the divine will, might have been justly left to perish in their sins. Grace, therefore, as a sovereign, had an undoubted right to communicate its blessings to this notorious transgressor or to that; to the completely vicious, or the comparatively virtuous; to the infant of a day, or to the hoary head bending to the grave. It looks for no moral qualifications on which to bestow its favours; but confers them on the guilty, the wretched, and the damnable. It delights in extending relief to the miserable—in supplying the wants of the unworthy. It triumphs in delivering its favourites from the depths of calamity; knowing that where much is forgiven, much will also be gratefully returned. It seems, indeed, from many examples left on record in the Bible, that divine goodness purposely sought for objects the most undeserving on which to exercise beneficence; that in ages to come, God might shew the exceeding

riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Jesus Christ; and that, for the encouragement of the indigent suppliant at his throne, it might appear, in every generation, that the unsearchable riches of his grace are treasures which no poverty can exhaust, and which divine fidelity itself stands pledged never to withhold.

“Such was the beneficent design of God, and such is the salutary genius of the gospel. Delightful, ravishing truth ! enough, one would think, to make the brow of melancholy wear a smile. The blessings of grace were never designed to distinguish the worthy, or to reward merit ; but to relieve the wretched and save the desperate. These are the patentees in the heavenly grant. Yea, they have an exclusive right. For, as to all those who imagine themselves to be the better sort of people ; who depend on their own duties, and plead their own worthiness ; who are not willing to stand on a level with publicans and harlots ; Christ has nothing to do with them, nor the gospel anything to say to them. As they are too proud to live upon alms, or to be entirely beholden to sovereign grace for all their salvation, so they must not take it amiss, if they have not the least assistance from that quarter.

They appeal to the law, and by it they must stand or fall."

The divine conduct, in saving sinners, has ever been an occasion of stumbling to the self-righteous moralist. This was strikingly exemplified during the life and ministry of our blessed Lord. His compassionate regard to those whom the scribes and Pharisees considered as the refuse of the people, was always objected to his mission and his character. He was contemptuously called, "a friend of publicans and sinners." It was said, in a way of reproach, "He receiveth sinners, and eateth with them ; he is gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner ;" and when the infamous prostitute came to Jesus, as he sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, and began to wash his feet with tears, and to wipe them with the hairs of her head, he that invited him spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him ; for she is a sinner. How is it, was the inquiry, that your master eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners ?

The deportment of the Pharisees was very different from the conduct of those whom they denominated sinners ; for these, it is pretty

evident, were notoriously abandoned, even to a proverb. The Pharisees imagined that the moral qualifications which they possessed ought, when contrasted with the character of those profligates with whom Jesus was familiar, to have secured them peculiar marks of favour and attachment. They argued, as all men naturally do, on a supposition that some sort of worthiness in the sinner must be the ground of divine approbation, and the only means by which that approbation can consistently be enjoyed. They were, in scripture language, whole. They did not consider themselves as diseased, and, of course, felt no need of a physician.

But so far was our blessed Lord from considering the objections brought against the publicans and sinners a just reason for treating them with abhorrence or neglect, that he made the very objection itself an argument for paying them particular attention. He tacitly admitted the truth of what the Pharisees alleged, and vindicated the propriety of his conduct on their own principles. You pronounce, as if he had said, and it is granted, that these men are extremely wicked ; that they are lost, as to themselves, and abandoned by reputable society ; and this charge they do

not pretend to deny, nor yet attempt to palliate their crimes ; surely, therefore, if any persons upon earth be completely wretched, these are the men. Your own assertions compel you to admit that they stand in need of commiseration and relief ; and that, if divine mercy be not gratuitously conferred, they must inevitably perish. In rescuing them from perdition, therefore, I am only doing what you, in other cases, would both commend and imitate. “ For what man among you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost, until he find it ? Either, what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it ? ” Now, I have publicly and repeatedly declared that I am come to seek and to save that which was lost. This is my errand ; and therefore you must allow that, if there be any consistency between my pretensions and my conduct, these publicans and sinners are the very persons whom I ought to save ; and that, instead of attempting to avoid intercourse with them, it is rather my duty to promote it ; for the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the

righteous, but sinners to repentance; and where should the physician be found but among them that are diseased? Or with whom should the Saviour associate, but with those whom he came purposely to save?

“The atonement a Redeemer’s love has wrought
Is not for you—the righteous need it not.
Seest thou yon harlot wooing all she meets,
The worn out nuisance of the public streets;
Herself from morn to night, from night to morn,
Her own abhorrence, and as much your scorn?
The gracious shower, unlimited and free,
Shall fall on her—when heaven denies it thee.
Of all that wisdom dictates, this the drift,
That man is dead in sin—and life a gift.”

This consolatory truth is strikingly exemplified in the sequel of the following parable. “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. Then the master of the house

being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city—into the highways and hedges, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

That the conclusion of this parable primarily refers to the rejection of the Jewish nation for their unbelief, and to the subsequent promulgation of the gospel to the Gentiles, for whom that people entertained the most sovereign contempt, I have not the smallest doubt. But that the Pharisees and doctors of the law, to whom it was delivered, understood it in this sense is not probable. Their notions of the expected Messiah and his kingdom were so secularized, that they lost sight of the spiritual blessings to be derived either to themselves or to others from his appearance in the world: and were, besides, so circumscribed, owing perhaps to the exclusive privileges by which they had been so long distinguished from other nations, as to make it questionable whether they had, notwithstanding the perspicuity of ancient prophecies on this subject, any idea that at these nations were to participate in the same goodness in any other way than by becoming

proselytes to Judaism. It is, therefore, perfectly natural to suppose that, while our Lord predicted the awful consequences which were to follow his being rejected by that ungrateful nation, he intended the parable should, at the same time, be strikingly applicable to these whited sepulchres who had, by their doctrine and contemptuous treatment of himself, so largely contributed to accelerate its ruin.

By the servant being sent into the streets and lanes, the highways and hedges, these Pharisees and doctors of the law must have perceived that the master of the feast was determined to furnish his table with guests whom they utterly abhorred: that by so doing he was, in fact, contrasting the vice attached to these despicable wretches with their virtue, and practically declaring that neither the abject situations, nor the detestable atrocities of these outcasts of society, were any bar to entertainment at his table; or to speak without a figure, and in reference to Christ and his kingdom, that their multiplied transgressions would not hinder the bestowment of his mercy, nor were they so incompatible with the nature of his mission, nor so likely to operate to his prejudice, as the abominable pride and self-righteousness which the scribes and Pharisees constantly manifested by their conduct.

Now, it must have been extremely mortifying to these restless persecutors of Christ, to find that their vacant seats were to be occupied by the refuse of mankind—by harlots, publicans, and profligates. They were too proud and too carnal to view themselves as sinners standing in need of such a Saviour as Christ professedly was. They expected a Messiah that would set up a temporal kingdom; that would emancipate them from the bondage of Rome, and exalt the nation to independence, opulence, and splendor. But when they found that our Lord's kingdom was not of this world, they opposed all his claims as the true Messiah; stigmatized his character with the most reproachful epithets; and persecuted him with unrelenting malice. "They saw that his humility favoured not their pride, and that his meekness was not likely to raise him from the footstool of the Roman empire to the throne of the world."

But what gave, perhaps, the greatest offence, and for which the Saviour of men was most despised and calumniated, was his unwearied attention and kindness to those whom the Pharisees emphatically denominated sinners. These blind guides, leaders of the blind, were too haughty to acknowledge his

divine mission; it did not quadrate with their erroneous sentiments and ambitious views. They were punctual in the discharge of various religious and moral duties that were to be seen of men—in paying tithe of mint and anise and cummin, but omitted the weightier matters of the law, such as judgment, mercy, and faith. It was, therefore, imagined that they were entitled to distinguishing marks of respectful attachment—that, if Jesus were really the Messiah, he would certainly have testified in the most public manner his approbation of their sanctimonious appearance, and have recommended them as perfect models of piety and virtue. They were ready to obtrude on his silence the query of their ungrateful progenitors: “What profit is it that we have kept his ordinances? Wherefore have we fasted and thou takest no knowledge?” But when they found that neither their religious nor their political notions met with his concurrence, they were exceedingly enraged; they aspersed the Holy One of Israel, and called the Messenger of peace, a deceiver—a fomentor of sedition—a blasphemer of his God—and an enemy to Cæsar.

These and similar remarks will, I trust, demonstrate that the love of God to man is

absolutely sovereign and free; and that no worthiness is sought for in the object on whom its blessings are conferred. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things that are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence." Were the glorious gospel revealed only, or principally, to the wise and the prudent, it would, as the excellent Charnock expresses it, be viewed as a discovery made to reason rather than to faith; and were divine grace communicated to the comparatively pure, it would be considered as a debt which the Almighty lay under some sort of obligation to discharge; but when both are bestowed on objects that are uncommonly depraved—that have nothing to plead in the extenuation of their guilt—there is no room for glorying, but he that glorieth must glory in the Lord.

Let it, however, be remembered, that the love of God, freely exercised towards his elect, is never to be viewed as detached from their Head and Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. In him they were chosen; in his comeliness

they are comely; in his righteousness they are righteous; in him shall they be blessed; and in him shall they glory. In them personally considered dwelleth no good thing. But they were chosen in him to grace and holiness here, and to glory hereafter. He, as the Head, they as the members; they are one with him, and where he is, there shall they be also. As Mediator of the covenant, he is the Father's elect, in whom he is well pleased; and the love of the divine Father to sinners is abundantly manifest in his choosing them in him as their Head—in making a covenant with him on their behalf—in afterwards quickening them by his Spirit—in the bestowment of grace, and in causing all things to work together for their good till he bring them to glory. "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things! Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is

even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

As, therefore, we have such indubitable evidence of the everlasting love of God to sinners, wherefore dost thou doubt? O thou of little faith! Let me say to you, Lavinia, as Jesus did to the ruler of the synagogue, Fear not, only believe, and thou shalt be made whole. When the ancient Israelites in the wilderness were bitten by the fiery serpents, Moses, you remember, was commanded to make a brazen serpent, to set it upon a pole, and to tell every one who was bitten, that if he looked upon it he should live. Now if, instead of instantly looking at this serpent, the wounded Israelite had stood reasoning with himself about the malignant nature of his

wound, or querying whether the means of recovery were adapted to the end, or whether a cure might not be effected some other way, he would have paid very dear for his ungrateful hesitancy. The healing of his body was connected with implicit and prompt obedience to the divine command; it was the only method prescribed for relief; and had the command been disregarded, he must inevitably have perished.

Now, thus it is, in a spiritual sense, with the soul. It is by nature the subject of moral evil, extremely depraved, and obnoxious to final perdition; and from this perdition there is no possibility of escape, except in the way that infinite mercy has graciously provided. What that way is, we learn from the lips of Him who said, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and of whom the brazen serpent was a striking figure. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," said the compassionate Saviour, "even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He that believeth on him is not con-

demned; but he that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Now, this Jesus has, according to his own declaration, been lifted up on the cross, as was the serpent on a pole in the desert; and he is still exhibited in the gospel as crucified, as the only way of escape from everlasting ruin, as the only medium of human happiness. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

But what, it may be asked, is the language of this crucified Saviour to perishing sinners? Does it equal the language of Moses? Yes; it is equally benign, and quite as encouraging. Let the trembling soul hear, and rejoice. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live. I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he

that believeth on me shall never thirst. I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength; even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

Such is the encouraging answer given by the voice of benevolence and of truth to the trembling querist; and nearly similar is the paraphrase of a celebrated writer in replying to the same inquiry. "Look unto me, wretched ruined transgressors, as the wounded Israelites looked unto the brazen serpent. Look unto me dying on the cross as your victim, and obeying the law as your surety. Not by doing, but by looking and believing; not by your own deeds, but by my works, and my sufferings, be ye saved. This is the mysterious, but certain way of salvation. Thus shall ye be delivered from guilt, rescued from hell, and reconciled to God. Who are invited to partake of this inestimable benefit? All the ends of the earth. People of every nation un-

der heaven, of every station in life, of every condition, and of every character, not excepting the chief of sinners. To me every knee shall bow. Every soul of man, who desires to inherit eternal life, shall submit to my righteousness, and as an unworthy creature, as an obnoxious criminal, obtain the blessing wholly through my atonement. To me every tongue shall swear. Be man's supposed virtues ever so various, or ever so splendid, all shall be disclaimed, and my worthiness alone shall stand. Renouncing every other trust, they shall repose the confidence of their souls on me alone, and make public confession of this their faith before the world. "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength. A righteousness without spot, without defect, and in all respects consummate; such as satisfies every requirement of the law, and most thoroughly expiates all my iniquities; such as renders me completely accepted before my Judge, and entitles me to everlasting life."

Now the sinner, whose conscience is burdened with guilt and alarmed with danger, is not to hesitate—not to question whether his sins be too many or too great to be pardoned: because this would tacitly impeach the divine veracity; but to view the exhortation and the

promise made to faith—to look instantly to Jesus, as the stung Israelite did to the brazen serpent, nothing doubting—viewing him as the only means appointed for relief, and firmly persuaded, because God hath said it, that whosoever looketh to him, or believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins.

Thus to believe, and thus to act, is to put honour on the head of Jesus—is to treat him as a Saviour—to regard his atonement as worthy of all acceptation—his blood as cleansing from all sin: and is, in fact, a renunciation of all personal worth as being in any degree the ground of forgiveness. It is a practical declaration, that in the Lord only we have righteousness and strength, peace and assurance for ever—that besides him there is no Saviour.

When the salvation of the soul becomes an object of attention, it is common for unconverted men to ask, as did those that followed Christ in the days of his humiliation, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? The heavenly blessedness is always viewed as the reward of religious and moral duties that either have been, or are to be, performed. But the answer to this inquiry then was, and still is: “This is the work of God,

that we believe on him whom he hath sent." Nor should it ever be forgotten, that the salvation of the gospel is by promise; which promise is made, not to him that worketh: not to him that is less vile than his neighbour, but to faith—to the man, whatever be his character or his conduct, who believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly; to him that shall "confess with his mouth the Lord Jesus, and that shall believe in his heart that God hath raised him from the dead. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Whosoever, therefore, shall thus believe, and thus confess, shall, as the scripture hath said, undoubtedly be saved.

We are apt to forget, or perhaps do not properly consider, that salvation originated in the sovereign pleasure of God—that it is a blessing which might, or might not have been conferred on the apostate sons of Adam: that the forgiveness of sin is not in any way connected with the moral qualifications they possess, or the duties they perform, but solely with the work and worth of his own Son, on whom they have no claim, and which, as a gift, is graciously bestowed on the absolutely unworthy—not as meriting mercy, but as deserv-

ing eternal ruin. It should also be remembered, that whatever is said concerning this salvation, is to be cordially believed on divine testimony, without the concurrent evidence of our senses; because it is an affair with which they are not conversant—of which they can take no cognizance. The inestimable blessing must also be regarded as all-sufficient for the purposes intended, and as the only means by which eternal happiness can be enjoyed—as free for sinners, without exception of character, and as infallibly connected with faith. He, therefore, that shall see the plague of his own heart—that shall acknowledge it to be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked—who shall contemplate a life spent in gratifying the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—who shall feel his accumulated guilt as a load that might justly sink him into endless perdition—and who, notwithstanding these apparent discouragements, shall believe with his heart the record, “that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son—that he was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification—that his blood cleanseth from all sin—that his righteousness justifieth from all iniquity:” who shall gladly receive the

cheering testimony, and confide in that testimony, in defiance of all the accusations of conscience, the suggestions of Satan, the frowns or the smiles of the world—is strong in faith, giving glory to God—lays hold on eternal life, and shall undoubtedly be saved.

“For what is evangelical faith,” says the very excellent and judicious Booth, “but the receiving of Christ and his righteousness—or, in other words, a dependence on Jesus only for eternal salvation? A dependence upon him as all-sufficient to save the most guilty; as every way suitable to supply the wants of the most needy; and absolutely free for the vilest of sinners. The divine Redeemer and his finished work being the object of faith, and the report of the gospel its warrant and ground, to believe is to trust entirely and without reserve on the faithful word which God hath spoken, and on the perfect work which Christ hath wrought. Such is the faith of God’s elect: and happy, thrice happy they that are interested in this divine righteousness, and have received the atonement! All such are pronounced righteous by the eternal Judge. There is nothing to be laid to their charge. They are acquitted with honour to all the perfections of Deity, and everlastingly free from condemnation. Their

sins, though ever so numerous or ever so hateful, being purged away by atoning blood; and their souls being vested with that most excellent robe, the Redeemer's righteousness; they are without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. They are presented by their great Representative, in the body of his flesh, through death, holy, unblamable, and unprovable in the sight of Omniscience. They are fair as the purest wool; whiter than the virgin snow. The work and worthiness of the Lord Redeemer give them acceptance with infinite majesty and dignity before the angels of light. Works of every law, in every sense, as performed by man, are entirely excluded from having any concern in our acceptance with God. Since, therefore, it is in Christ only, as our head, representative and surety, that we are or can be justified, he alone should have the glory. He is infinitely worthy to have the unrivalled honour. Let the sinner, then, the ungodly wretch, trust in the obedience of the dying Jesus, as being absolutely sufficient to justify him without any good works or duties—without any good habits or qualities, however performed or acquired; and eternal truth hath declared for his encouragement, that he shall not be disappointed."

One reason why we are so perplexed with doubts and fears respecting the safety of our state, is the weakness of our faith. We look more to our sins than to the Saviour; and by imagining that they are too many and too great to be pardoned, depreciate his all-sufficient atonement. We are not aware, perhaps, that by this conduct we are in fact saying, in opposition to scripture and experience, that the blood of Christ doth not cleanse from all sin, that his righteousness doth not justify from all iniquity, that he is not able to save to the uttermost, that he will cast out some that come to him. The truth is, we do not habitually live under a deep conviction of our absolute unworthiness of divine mercy, of our constant need of forgiveness, of our utter helplessness in the affair of salvation, and the necessity there is of continual dependence on divine aid to carry on the work of faith with power, and also to keep us from falling a prey to perpetual dejection.

That a conviction of want naturally stimulates to action, is a position that needs no proof. A sense of weakness makes the feeble solicitous for strength. Guilt, felt and lamented, impels the sinner to be urgent for mercy. Apprehension of danger wings the

flight of him that pants for safety. The axiom is strikingly exemplified in the admirable plea of the Syrophenician woman. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." It is true the anxious suppliant at first met with much discouragement, but this discouragement only constrained her to be more importunate. She knew that her child stood in need of assistance; and that he to whom she applied was able to grant it; and were you equally sensible of your spiritual wants, and equally solicitous for the heavenly blessing; the same Lord would say unto you, as he did unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

On this principle acted the blind man who sat by the way side begging, when our Lord departed from Jericho. The petitioner had doubtless heard of the miracles and the beneficence of Jesus. He was also conscious that he stood in need of assistance, and convinced that the Saviour of men was able to grant it; and this conviction urged him to cry out, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me! And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace; but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David,

have mercy on me! And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him; and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him glorifying God."

Now the injunctions of the multitude could neither repress desire of relief, nor compel Bartimeus to desist from being importunate to gain it. The aid he wanted, the people could not give; nor would he suffer them to obstruct application to Him from whom he knew it could certainly be had. The very attempt to impose silence induced him to cry more loudly for help; nor did he cease to petition till his petition was granted.

Thus in reference to spiritual affairs, every man acts who feels his depravity and guilt; who knows his wounds to be incurable, unless He that forgiveth all our iniquities, and healeth all our diseases, have mercy on him. He is convinced, as was Bartimeus, that he cannot relieve himself—that vain is the help of man; but he has heard, and believes, that help is laid on one mighty to save; and has,

in application for succour, one advantage which the son of Timeus could not boast: he can plead both the power and the promise of the Saviour; and therefore, however apparently many or great his discouragements, to this Saviour he ever looks for acceptance and pardon. If enormous guilt wound the conscience and forbid his hope of remission, he becomes more urgent for help. His importunity for mercy is, in some measure, proportioned to the worth of the blessing and the danger of losing it. He knows there is forgiveness with God for the chief of sinners—that he will in no wise cast out them that come to him—that he never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. Under a sense of unworthiness and weakness, he is emboldened, because commanded, to take hold of Jehovah's strength; he says, therefore, with Jacob, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me—or interrogates with Peter, Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Does the christian wait for light, but behold obscurity? for brightness, but walk in darkness? he remembers him that said, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in

darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Though he slay me, says the disconsolate soul, yet will I trust in him; "the Lord is the God of truth, he will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies."

Of the strength of faith, and the power of unbelief, we have a striking instance in the conduct of Peter. The apostle, with other disciples, "was in a ship in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him, and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the winds boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught

him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Now, you will be pleased to remember, that the command of Christ was Peter's warrant for venturing on the agitated lake of Tiberias. Without this command, the attempt would have been presumptuous in the extreme; and, had he kept that in view during the perilous excursion, instead of the winds and the waves, he would have reached the object of his confidence without alarms or danger, or manifesting symptoms of distrust. It is said, indeed, that the wind was boisterous; and on a cursory survey of the passage, it seems, as if this circumstance alone had occasioned his fears; but it is much more consistent with the divine narrative, and the rebuke with which he was afterward accosted, to attribute these fears chiefly to his unbelief. The wind appears to have been high during great part of the night, and was, most probably, tempestuous at the time of Christ's appearance; but were it allowed to be otherwise at the instant of Peter's debarkation, this would only be admitting an apology for his timidity at the expense of his understanding. For he could not be so ignorant as to imagine that the watery element was more solid because less turbulent: and he must have known

that the power which was able to consolidate the sea in a calm, was also able to make the foaming surge firm as adamant. The fact is, the renowned Cephas forgot his own request, and also the command and the almighty power of his Lord. He began to look at second causes; to reflect, perhaps, that he had precipitately left the bark where safety might have been reasonably expected, and was attempting to tread on a wave that threatened to engulf him in a moment.

Now, thus it frequently happens with the trembling sinner that is awakened to a sense of his danger; and who, as a wretch that deserves to perish, is encouraged to rely on Christ, as a complete Saviour from the guilt of sin, and from the curse of the divine law, which he is conscious of having violated in a thousand instances. The invitation and the promise exhibited to the dejected and burdened suppliant are not suspended on the performance of certain conditions, or on the conscious possession of holy qualities. It is not said, Look into yourselves, or to something you have done, either to merit, or to predispose you to receive my salvation; but—"Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth. I am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour.

Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Now, instead of attending entirely to these encouraging declarations, the self-condemned sinner is apt to contemplate the magnitude of his guilt; to stand questioning whether it be not too enormous to be forgiven; or, on the other hand, whether, if pardonable, he be sufficiently humbled to receive the astonishing favour, but this is to act the part of Peter; to look at sin and its guilt (as he did at the wind and the waves) instead of the Saviour; to regard the suggestions of unbelief more than the invitation and the promise. The question in this case is not, whether my sins be great, or comparatively small; not whether

I have attained a certain degree of humiliation, and am conscious that my compunction is proportioned to my guilt; but whether Christ have not unequivocally declared, without any reference to the depth of my contrition, or the magnitude of my sin, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out? Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life; he shall never perish." Now, if this be true; if Jesus have made these infinitely gracious declarations, the trembling sinner is not to hesitate, but confidently to believe the soul-cheering testimony; to come to him as a vile sinner, as a wretch that deserves to perish; and without looking into himself for any prerequisites in order to the reception of mercy, to cast his burden of guilt upon Christ as a sin-bearing Saviour, looking to his atonement as the only ground of forgiveness; knowing and believing that what he hath said, he will most assuredly perform. This is to receive by faith the testimony of God concerning his Son, rather than that of man—than of Satan—than of the clamorous accusations of a guilty con-

science; and to give glory to the expiation of him that once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

But though the divine declarations respecting salvation by Jesus Christ, are exactly suited to the wretched condition of man, and adapted to produce hope and excite confidence; yet they seldom meet with implicit credit, or at least, are rarely viewed as exhibiting all that is necessary to exempt from condemnation and from death. There is in the hearts of all natural men a propensity to expect deliverance by the deeds of the law; and there are, perhaps, but few christians in whom the same legal principle does not, more or less, imperceptibly operate.

Whence originates that distrust of forgiveness with which many of those who have been eminent for vice are perpetually harassed, but from a consciousness of enormous guilt? It is not, in this case, my being a sinner merely, but my being so great a sinner, that is the ground of discouragement; which is virtually saying, were I less guilty, I should have more hope. But this conclusion is fallacious. It is true, I may have been notoriously profligate, and when contrasted with others, a monster in wickedness; but it should be remembered that the

commission of one sin, though not attended with the same degree of guilt, nor deserving the same punishment, will as certainly bar the way to heaven as the perpetration of a thousand. The felicity first promised to man, was connected with perfect obedience to the divine precept. The question, therefore, is, Am I a transgressor? If so, I am excluded from all hope of pardon on the ground of personal desert. The law of God, as a covenant promising life, is abrogated; and the only concern it has with me as a sinner, is to denounce sentence of death. Future blessedness is, therefore, as far out of the reach of the comparatively virtuous, as the completely vicious. Neither of them can obtain it on the ground of merit. If candidates for divine favour, they must both stand indebted to absolute grace; and as it is no more difficult with God to remit, in virtue of an atonement, enormous than trivial offences, the most abandoned wretch has, when applying for mercy, the same foundation on which to build his hope, and as much encouragement to expect forgiveness, as he that may be properly denominated the least of sinners. The one, indeed, will have much forgiven, and should endeavour to proportion his gratitude to the benefit received; but the

other will, notwithstanding, have to ascribe his salvation to the same source, and be under equal obligation to adore the hand which, if it have not rescued him from the same depths of iniquity, has, nevertheless, graciously restrained him from the desire, or the opportunity of committing it.

The awakened sinner is apt to imagine that it is great presumption to come to God for pardon in his natural defilement. He, therefore, looks into himself for a pious turn of heart, or for something to recommend him to mercy. But such a conduct is offensive to God. This is not to consider ourselves as possessing nothing—as deserving nothing—“as wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” We do that which is pleasing in his sight, when we believe on his Son, Jesus Christ—when we come as sinners for pardon through his blood. This is a practical confession of guilt. It is, in fact, saying, Lord, I am vile; magnify thy great name in my forgiveness. I am helpless; do thou undertake for me. In myself, I am entirely lost; do thou save me! Or, in other words, I feel and acknowledge, O Lord, that whatever the scriptures have said concerning sin and its consequences, is perfectly just. I see that Jesus Christ is the only

Saviour; “that there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Therefore, merciful Father, spare, for his sake, a detestable wretch that is completely miserable—glorify thy grace—thy Son—his work—his worthiness—in saving a criminal that deserves to perish. His blood cleanseth from all sin: his righteousness justifieth from all iniquity. Oh help me to confide in him only—to ascribe to him all the glory of my deliverance from condemnation and from ruin. Suppress—for ever suppress the thought that would attempt to divide or diminish his praise. His own arm has brought salvation; from henceforth, therefore, let me never lose sight for one moment of my own poverty and wretchedness, nor of the all-sufficiency of his atonement. This is the foundation of my trust, the ground of my confidence; that by which my faith is strengthened, my hope abounds, and by which I am encouraged to enter daily with boldness into the holiest of all.

If the Lord have laid our iniquities upon Christ—if he have been made sin and a curse for us—if he have indeed been wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; and have really paid the price of our re-

demption—surely every attempt to obtain forgiveness in any other way must be highly offensive to the Majesty of heaven. Thus to act, is not to glorify his wisdom in providing this way of escape from ruin, nor the work of Him who is styled emphatically the Way, but to disparage both the one and the other. It is, as the justly celebrated Owen expresses it, “to take the work out of Christ’s hands and ascribe salvation to other things—to repentance—to duties. Men do not say so, but they do so. The commutation they make, if they make any, is with themselves. The work that Christ came to do in the world, was to bear our iniquities, and to lay down his life a ransom for our sins. What greater dishonour then can be done to the Lord Jesus, than to ascribe this work to anything else?”

The ever blessed God, who is perfectly acquainted with the malignant nature of sin, and with its natural tendency to generate in the human heart distrust of all that is said in reference to forgiveness, has mercifully left on record many exceedingly great and precious promises adapted to counteract its pernicious influence, and to administer strong consolation to those that have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in the gospel.

What objection of unbelief has not divine goodness anticipated and completely answered? and yet how reluctant are we implicitly to regard these answers as affording incontestable proof that there is forgiveness with God, or at least of there being forgiveness for the notoriously profligate! What more common than to hear the awakened sinner reasoning thus: My sins are of so peculiar a nature—the circumstances attending them so aggravating—my guilt so complicated—nay, there is not a sin that I have not actually or intentionally committed—the Almighty, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, can never forgive such a detestable wretch, much less make him an inheritor of glory.

But what does the God of Israel say to such sinners and to such objections? Does he spurn them from his presence as filthy and loathsome, and consign them to the abodes of everlasting darkness and despair? No; the answer is astonishingly benign and infinitely gracious. Let the sinner hear—attentively hear and rejoice—“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgres-

sions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee. The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found."

This is the language of mercy and benevolence indeed! Surely we may say with the prophet, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."

We are apt to forget that the grace of God in the promises is not made to such as deserve mercy, but, as one expresses it, "to such as want it; not to righteous persons, but to sinners; not to the whole, but to the sick. Such

therefore who, through the weakness of faith, or the violence of temptation, find it difficult to lay hold on the promises which respect the pardon of sin, and the attaining life and salvation, should remember that the root and principle from whence the promises spring is not from any good within us, but wholly from grace without us—that from the beginning to the end of our salvation, nothing is primarily active but free grace. All the promises of God are made in Christ, and derive their certainty and stability from him in whom they are made—not from us to whom they are made; they are all ratified with the same oath and purchased by the same blood, and are, therefore, sure to all the seed, and it is neither the magnitude nor the multitude of our sins that precludes hope of forgiveness.”

Turn, therefore, to Christ the strong hold, thou prisoner of hope. Why sayest thou, “My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but

they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." In patience, therefore, possess your soul; "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thy Maker is thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

Such are the declarations, and such the

promises left on record to support the believer under the anxieties and temptations of the present life. Language more benign and gracious, more replete with sympathetic tenderness and mercy, with unbounded goodness and affection, cannot be easily selected; and were it not known that sin has a natural tendency to produce in the conscience terror and distrust, it would not be hastily believed that the heart that had once realized the consolation of forgiveness, could again become the subject of doubt. The christian, however, should remember, that whatever be the degree of his guilt or his misery; however great and numerous his fears; however many and apparently insurmountable the obstacles that stand in the way of his future blessedness, he has indubitable evidence that he shall finally possess it. The almighty power and faithfulness of God stand pledged that nothing shall frustrate his hopes. He may say to his soul in the midst of all the storms and vicissitudes of time,

“The stars shall fade away, the sun himself
Grow dim with age, and nature sink in years
But thou shalt flourish in immortal youth,
Unhurt amidst the war of elements,
The wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds!

I am yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

Have angels sinned, and shall not man beware?
How shall a son of earth decline the snare?
Not folded arms, and slackness of the mind,
Can promise for the safety of mankind.
None are supinely good ; through care and pain,
And various arts, the steep ascent we gain.
This is the seat of combat, not of rest ;
Man's is laborious happiness at best.
On this side death his dangers never cease,
His joys are joys of conquest, not of peace.

YOUNG.



THAT the Lord hath been to you, “as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds,” affords me unspeakable pleasure, and for which I devoutly join with you in grateful acknowledgments to the Father of mercies. With you it is no longer difficult to believe that, though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning ; nor that chastening, though grievous for the present, nevertheless afterward yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to

them that are exercised thereby. Alas! how slow of heart are we to believe what prophets and apostles have said concerning the salvation of God; and even what He testified of it, who is the true and faithful Witness, and who spoke as never man spoke!

Whether that peace of conscience you happily experience, through faith in the atonement, will meet with no interruption is not my province to determine. For such is the degeneracy of human nature, and such the base ingratitude of the human heart, that incidents the most trifling sometimes divert attention from the one thing needful, and too frequently betray into actions which involve guilt, and which, of course, deprive us of that tranquillity which is enjoyed in communion with God. Gratitude is not the characteristic of man. We are prone to be unmindful of benefits received—to lose sight of our perpetual obligations to divine goodness; and in the hour of torpid indifference, lightly to esteem the Rock of salvation. If, therefore, “we forsake his law, and walk not in his judgments; if we break his statutes, and keep not his commandments;” it may reasonably be expected that he will “visit our transgression with the rod, and our iniquity with stripes

—that we shall know and see it is an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord God, in whose favour there is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life.”

But supposing there were in the christian’s conduct no deviation from the path of rectitude; that, in duty, the eye were always single; that the honour of God were kept constantly in view, and that his prospects of interest in divine favour were never clouded; yet must he expect to meet with many things to try his faith and interrupt his quiet. Is it probable that a sinner, recently delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, should not meet with temptations and assaults in consequence of allegiance to his new Sovereign? Can it be reasonably imagined that a man devoted to sensuality—who sought all his happiness in gratifying the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; who perhaps was uncommonly assiduous to involve all his companions in the same guilt, and was himself always foremost in the paths of death—is it imaginable, I ask, that such a man should relinquish his criminal pursuits, abandon the society of those whom he had perhaps ruined, or rendered vicious by his example and his

counsel, and not meet with contempt, with ridicule or with slander? His associates in wickedness will not fail to mark the alteration of his conversation and his conduct; but as they have no perception of the principles by which he is actuated, they will attribute both to improper motives—to pharisaical pride or sanctimonious ostentation. His deportment will be construed into a tacit reprehension of their sinful practices; and, when contrasted with what he himself once was, denominated hypocritical or enthusiastic.

Now, if this be the case between man and man, what may not the christian expect from the implacable malignity of Satan? He has lost a subject that was once vigilant and active; his government is renounced. Implicit subjection to his authority is no longer practicable. He is treated as a vile usurper, and all compliance with his suggestions considered as actual rebellion against God. This indefatigable adversary of man walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; and though he be convinced of never having yet been able to destroy one of the subjects of Christ's kingdom, yet such is the inveteracy of his malice, that he continually labours to subvert their allegiance, to betray them into

sin, and ever afterwards to harass them with guilt.

That afflictions are not in themselves joyous, but grievous, will on all hands be readily allowed; but that to man, in the present life, they have a salutary tendency, is a truth which may not, perhaps, be received with the same implicit credit. We are told, however, by one who was no stranger to calamity, that the great Parent of the universe doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. In the day of prosperity we are commanded to be joyful, but in the day of adversity to consider. These are hours in which we may reflect on the past, and contemplate the future with advantage; in which we may find leisure to recollect how the mind was imperceptibly drawn from the paths of virtue; to trace the gradual progress of vice; to remember with what compunction the bonds of duty were first broken; how that compunction was insensibly diminished by a repetition of the same sins, till at length these sins, and, perhaps, others more atrocious, were frequently committed without remorse, and without shame.

Were the mind thus occupied in seasons of distress, we should have some faint discoveries of the malignant nature of moral evil as well

as of the degree of our own guilt ; and instead of murmuring at the hand by which we were stopped in the career of vice, perceive abundant cause to be astonished at the long suffering and forbearance of God ! Each delinquent would have reason to exclaim : “ It is of the Lord’s mercies that I am not consumed. Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.” And were these, or similar expressions, the genuine language of the heart, no abstruse reasoning would be needful to prove that the soul is in a situation not less perilous than were those who, in the hour of distress, cried to the Saviour of men, “ Lord, save us ; we perish.”

But, whatever men of the world may think of afflictions, the christian has learned by experience how to estimate their worth. He can say with the psalmist, “ It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes ; before I was afflicted I went astray.” He knows it is “ needful that he should sometimes be in heaviness through manifold temptations ; that the trial of his faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

“ Prosperity, alloyed and imperfect as it is,

has power to intoxicate the imagination ; to fix the mind upon the present scene ; to produce confidence and elation ; and to make him who enjoys affluence and honours forget the hand by which they were bestowed. It is seldom that we are otherwise, than by affliction, awakened to a sense of our own imbecility, or taught to know how little all our acquisitions can conduce to safety or to quiet ; and how justly we may ascribe to the superintendence of a higher power, those blessings which in the wantonness of success we considered as the attainments of our policy or courage.”

Next to divine grace, “nothing confers so much ability to resist the temptations that perpetually surround us, as an habitual consideration of the shortness of life, and the uncertainty of those pleasures that solicit our pursuit ; and this consideration can be inculcated only by affliction. O death ! how bitter is the remembrance of thee, to a man that lives at ease in his possessions !” If our present state were one continued succession of delights, or one uniform flow of calmness and tranquillity, we should never willingly think upon its end ; death would then surely surprise us as “a thief in the night ;” and our task of duty would remain unfinished, till the night came when no man can work.

“While affliction thus prepares us for felicity, we may console ourselves under its pressures, by remembering, that they are no particular marks of divine displeasure; since all the distresses of persecution have been suffered by those of whom the world was not worthy; and the Redeemer of mankind himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

But should the christian not feel the weight of personal afflictions, there are, perhaps, sources of inquietude equally painful, from which he cannot hope to escape, and for the endurance of which he will stand in need both of faith and of patience. He will have to wrestle, not merely against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore he is commanded to put on the whole armour of God, that he may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance; for he that shall be found so doing will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and though he may be greatly harassed in his march, he shall not be over-

come ; though he be cast down, yet he shall arise ; and though faint in the conflict, finally prevail, and be more than conqueror.

Permit me, therefore, to say to you, as the sympathizing Saviour did to his mournful disciples : Let not your heart be troubled ; in your Father's house are many mansions. Jesus is gone to prepare a place for you, and will come again, and receive you unto himself ; that where he is, you may be also. The ransomed of the Lord "shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." In the present world, which is fitly compared to a waste, howling wilderness, where are pricking briars and grieving thorns, the christian must expect to meet with many obstructions ; with much to perplex his mind, to excite discouragement, and to impede his journey. But, ere long, he will pass the waters of Jordan, and reach the desired haven, where he shall peacefully enjoy the object of his hope, without interruption and without satiety.

The children of God, during their pilgrimage on earth, bear no marks by which men of the world recognize their heavenly birth, or learn to estimate their high privileges. "A

good man is subject, like other mortals, to all the influences of natural evil; his harvest is not spared by the tempest, nor his cattle by the murrain; his house flames like others in a conflagration; nor have his ships any peculiar power of resisting hurricanes; his mind, however elevated, inhabits a body subject to innumerable casualties, of which he must always share the dangers and the pains; he bears about him the seeds of disease, and may linger away a great part of his life under the tortures of the gout or stone; at one time groaning with insufferable anguish, at another dissolved in listlessness and languor.

Afflictions and poverty, persecution, fines, imprisonment and death, are not viewed by the giddy and the gay, the wise and the prudent, as indications of sonship; but as tokens of extreme depravity and enormous guilt; as expressions of divine vengeance rather than of mercy; as the frowns of an incensed judge, not as the salutary chastisements of a loving father. But some, or all of these, the children of God experience; yea, says an apostle, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution. "In the world," said the despised Saviour, "ye shall have tribulation; for if ye were of the world, the world would

love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

It is usually our resemblance to others, says an excellent prelate, that makes them think and speak well of us; whosoever commends another, commends something that he supposeth, at least, he hath in himself; and this is the reason of that woe of our Saviour, "Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you!" When wicked men speak well of us, it is a sign that we are too much like them. Even a heathen could say, when highly applauded by the vulgar, "What evil have I done, that these men praise me?"

The disciples of Christ are an afflicted and poor people; in general, literally poor; and on this account, frequently viewed by the world as mean and contemptible. Their heavenly Father is pleased, for the best reasons, to withhold from them many things that glitter in the eye of sense; that are sure to attract notice, and which generally secure to the owner, of whatever character, unqualified tokens of adulation and respect. But the christian is not without his consolations. Exclusion from transitory good is abundantly recompensed by the contemplation of objects that dignify while

they delight; that irradiate the mind and exhilarate the heart; that raise the affections above terrestrial scenes, and enable the soul, not merely to anticipate, but to realize something of the felicities of glory. Considerations these of immense worth, “compared to which all other is to man, condemned as he is, shortly to die, but puerile amusement, a house of cards, a bubble blown up into the air, and displaying deceitful colours in a momentary sunshine.”

What strong encouragement, therefore, what sublime pleasure must it afford the weary pilgrim, labouring under the infirmities of decaying nature, to reflect that the period is fast approaching when the soul, released from the bondage of corruption, shall be completely sanctified; all its faculties enlarged; all its powers invigorated; when every perplexing doubt, every anxious fear, every distracting care, shall be banished for ever; when nothing shall divide his heart, or interrupt his worship; but, having entered into rest, he shall joyfully unite in singing with all the ransomed of the Lord, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

But, though the saints of the Most High be now despised and rejected; though they be accounted by the wicked as the refuse and offscouring of all things, and their end to be without honour, this will not always be the case. No; when put into possession of the new Jerusalem, it may be said with an emphasis, they shall no more be termed *forsaken*—for God, their everlasting Father, will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more sorrow, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. Then shall they review, with grateful hearts, all the way in which the Lord led them in the wilderness; the way in which they were frequently discouraged; in which they had enemies powerful and numerous to encounter, and concerning whom it shall be sung with triumph, “We are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

We are, it is true, in the present state absent from the Lord; we walk by faith, not by sight. “God hath put a distance between the promise and the performance, so that it may be said, in a comparative view, that the present life is rather a life of hope than of enjoyment; and that the good things he gives relate more

to the future than the present." But in the realms of glory and of blessedness, the saints will see face to face, and know even as also they are known. The glories of the celestial city are viewed through a glass darkly; but in the full fruition of God, their eyes shall see the King in all his beauty. They shall exult in the full display of his infinite perfections, and stand astonished at the breadth and length, the depth and height, of the love of Christ; while they joyfully experience the accomplishment of his own prayer, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me."

The felicity of the saints on earth is frequently interrupted, and always imperfect. But in the heavenly world it will be perpetual, vigorous, and complete. For could their happy souls look forward to a moment that should terminate their bliss, the prospect would strike a damp on every enjoyment—it would fill them with horror. But a thought like this can never enter the mansions where perfection reigns and glory triumphs. Their happiness will be unspeakable, immutable, and eternal. They will be subjects of an everlasting kingdom. Their inheritance will be incorruptible.

They will be “ever with the Lord, in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

Such are the prospects and such the pleasures exhibited by the scriptures to invigorate faith and inspire hope with confidence. “For what is death to that mind which considers eternity as the career of its existence? What are the frowns of fortune to him who claims an eternal world as his inheritance? What is the loss of friends to that heart which feels, with more than natural conviction, that it shall quickly rejoin them in a more tender, intimate, and permanent intercourse than any of which the present life is susceptible? What are the fluctuations and vicissitudes of external things to a mind which strongly and uniformly anticipates a state of endless and immutable felicity? What are mortifications, disappointments, and insults, to a spirit which is conscious of being the original offspring and adopted child of God; which knows that its omnipotent Father will, in proper time, effectually assert the dignity and privileges of its nature? In a word, as earth is but a speck of creation, as time is not an instant in proportion to eternity, such are the hopes and prospects of the christian in comparison of every sublunary misfortune or

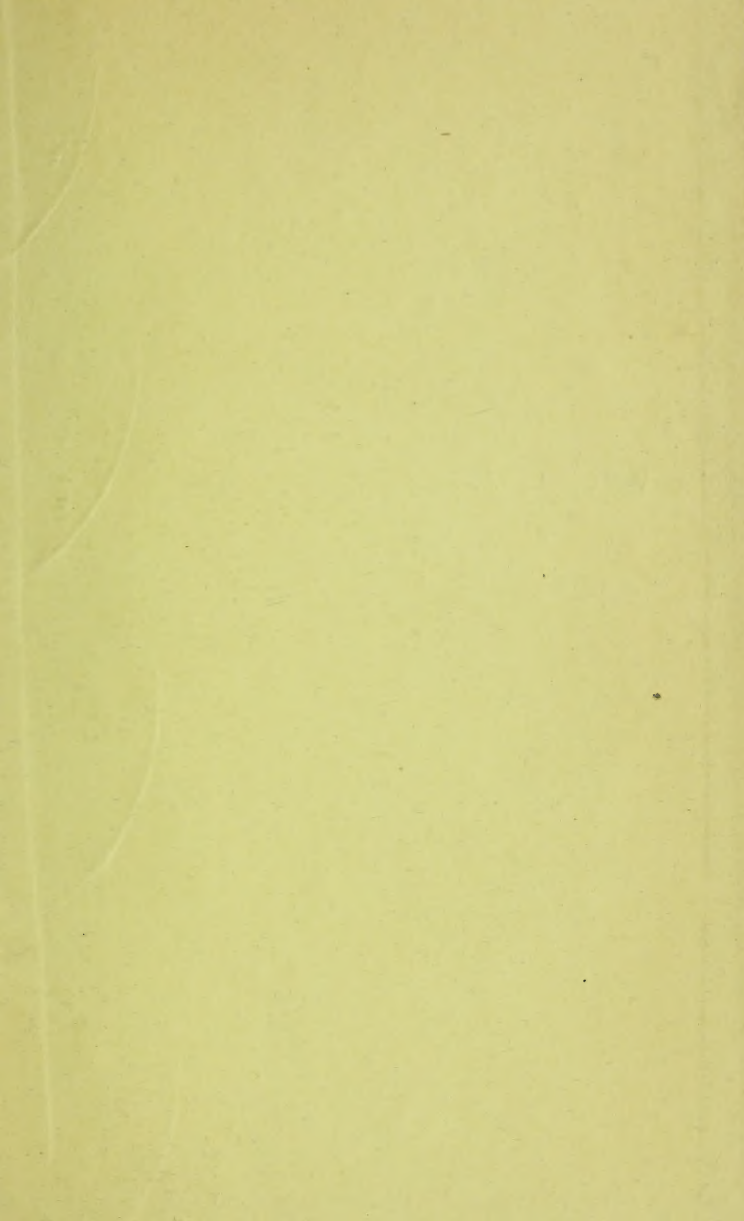
difficulty. It is, therefore, in his judgment the eternal wonder of angels, and indelible opprobrium of man, that a religion so worthy of God, so suitable to the frame and circumstances of our nature, so consonant to all the dictates of reason, so friendly to the dignity and improvement of intelligent beings, pregnant with genuine comfort and delight, should be rejected and despised."

That there remaineth a rest to the people of God, the christian has no doubt. O happy state! Surely the hope of enjoying it must administer strong consolation. What are the momentary trials of the present life, when compared to an eternity of blessedness? They are nothing—they are lost in the comparison. A sight of danger and of difficulties, of enemies, numerous and powerful, will, it is true, sometimes discourage, and cause even the most valiant to halt; but how animating to recollect that we maintain the spiritual conflict in the strength of Omnipotence—that the Captain of our salvation has himself fought and conquered—that he is entered into his glory, and has taken possession of the crown! He inhabits the praises of eternity—he is supremely blessed. But while supremely blessed—while encircled with the grateful songs of Seraphim

and of saints, is he an unconcerned spectator of our conflicts? No: to them that have no might he increaseth strength. He proclaims aloud to the christian warrior; "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. He shall be clothed in white raiment. I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. He shall sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father in his throne."

I have only to add, Lavinia, that this is a contest in which vigilance must not relax; in which no truce can be admitted; no proposals for capitulation accepted; no league of amity concluded. Nothing short of perpetual resistance can ensure tranquillity: nor must the brave assailant hope for conquest till he fall in the combat. Pray, therefore, that you may "neither faint nor be weary, but prevail unto victory. For though the conflict may be sharp and long, yet the sweetness of the reward will abundantly recompense the trouble of resistance; and the joy of the triumph, the toils of the war."

I am yours, &c.



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